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# ENGLISH THOUGHT

## IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

VOL. I.

*HISTORY OF*

# ENGLISH THOUGHT

IN THE

# EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

BY

LESLIE STEPHEN

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

WITHDRAWN

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# PREFACE.

THE PLAN of this book was, I believe, suggested to me by Mr. Pattison's essay upon the 'Tendencies of Religious Thought in England from 1688 to 1750.' I thought that it might be worth while to give a more detailed and systematic account of the movement so admirably characterised in that essay. The history of the deistical controversy, which is the chief product of eighteenth-century theology, has been several times written. The first account of it is in Leland's 'View of the Deistical Writers' (1754–6), a book which has still a certain historical value, but which shows of course the narrowness and unfairness of contemporary controversy. It is in no sense philosophical. By far the best accounts of the deists, so far as I know, is Lechler's excellent 'Geschichte des Englischen Deismus' (Stuttgart, 1841). Lechler is a very candid, competent, and painstaking writer; and I am glad to refer to him for more detailed accounts of many of the deists than has been compatible with my own plan. Lechler's book, however, is devoted chiefly to the writers known distinctively as deists, to the comparative neglect of the more orthodox writers, who in reality represent a superficial modification of

Schrecker Collection (A1677)

the same general tendencies of thought. He describes one of the strands, not the whole cord. Mr. Hunt, in his 'History of Religious Thought in England,' has recently given a very full account of all the principal writers of the time, deist and orthodox. Mr. Hunt deserves high praise for his candour and industry; but he is content for the present to be rather an annalist than a historian of thought; and I differ widely from his estimate—so far as he has revealed it—of the true significance and relative importance of many of the writings concerned. Considering the difference of our first principles, it would be strange, indeed, if I were in this respect quite satisfied with his performance. But, in any case, I am glad to acknowledge many obligations to his work.

In order to give a satisfactory account of the deist controversy, it thus seemed necessary to describe the general theological tendencies of the time; and in order to set forth intelligibly the ideas which shaped those tendencies, it seemed desirable, again, to trace their origin in the philosophy of the time, and to show their application in other departments of speculation. I have, therefore, begun with an account of the contemporary philosophy, though, in repeating a thrice-told tale, I have endeavoured to be as brief as was compatible with my purpose. Further, I have tried to indicate the application of the principles accepted in philosophy and theology to moral and political questions, and their reflection in the imaginative literature of the time. In the chapter upon political theories, I have tried to keep as far as possible from the province of political or social history; and the

last chapter is of necessity little more than a collection of hints, which could not have been worked out in detail without expanding the book beyond all permissible limits and trespassing upon the province of literary criticism. The book, as it is, has assumed such dimensions that I have been unable to describe it satisfactorily by any other than the perhaps too ambitious title which it bears.

It only remains to say that, in the sections referring to Shaftesbury, Mandeville, and Warburton, I have in part reproduced articles of my own already published in my 'Essays on Freethinking and Plainspeaking;' and that the sections upon William Law have appeared in the second series of my 'Hours in a Library.'

LESLIE STEPHEN.

LONDON : *September* 1876.

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# ENGLISH THOUGHT

IN THE

# EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

## CHAPTER I.

### THE PHILOSOPHICAL BASIS.

### *I. INTRODUCTORY.*

1. BETWEEN the years 1739 and 1752 David Hume published philosophical speculations destined, by the admission of friends and foes, to form a turning-point in the history of thought. His first book 'fell dead-born from the press;' few of its successors had a much better fate. The uneducated masses were, of course, beyond his reach; amongst the educated minority he had but few readers; and amongst the few readers still fewer who could appreciate his thoughts. The attempted answers are a sufficient proof that even the leaders of opinion were impenetrable to his logic. Men of the highest reputation completely failed to understand his importance. Warburton and Johnson were successively dictators in the literary world. Warburton attacked Hume with a superb unconsciousness of their true proportions which has now become amusing. Johnson thought that Hume's speculations were a case of 'milking the bull'[1]—that is to say, of a morbid love of change involving a preference of new error to old truth—and imagined that he had been confuted by Beattie.[2]

If Hume impressed men of mark so slightly, we are

[1] Boswell, July 21st, 1763.

[2] 'Tour to the Hebrides.' October 1st, 1773.

tempted to doubt whether he can have affected the main current of thought. Yet, as we study the remarkable change in the whole tone and substance of our literature which synchronised with the appearance of Hume's writings, it is difficult to resist the impression that there is some causal relation. A cold blast of scepticism seems to have chilled the very marrow of speculative activity. Men have lost their interest in the deepest problems, or write as though paralysed by a half-suppressed consciousness of the presence of a great doubter.

2. The explanation of the apparent contradiction must doubtless be sought partly in the fact that Hume influenced a powerful though a small class. He appealed to a few thinkers, who might be considered as the brain of the social organism; and the effects were gradually propagated to the extremities of the system. The influence, indeed, of Hume's teaching is the more obscure because chiefly negative. It produced in many minds a languid scepticism which cared little for utterance, and might see, without proclaiming, the futility of Warburton's insolence or Johnson's dogmatic contempt. But the rapidity and extent of the transformation of the whole body of speculation points unmistakably to the working of influences too manifold and potent to be embodied in any single personality. The soul of the nation was stirred by impulses of which Hume was but one, though by far the ablest, interpreter; or, to speak in less mystical phrase, we must admit that thousands of inferior thinkers were dealing with the same problems which occupied Hume, and, though with far less acuteness or logical consistency, arriving at similar solutions. It is as if they felt what Hume saw, or perceived implicitly and obscurely what he brought out with the most explicit lucidity. What is the real nature of this process? How is it that a tacit intellectual co-operation is established between minds placed far apart in the scale of culture and natural acuteness? How is it that the thought of the intellectual leaders is obscurely reflected by so many darkened mirrors, even when we are unable to point to any direct and overt means of transmission? How far may we believe in the apparent unity of that shifting chaos of speculations of more or less independent thinkers, which forms what we vaguely describe as public opinion, or the spirit of the age?

3. Historians of philosophy naturally limit their attention to the ablest thinkers. They tell us how the torch was passed from hand to hand—from Descartes to Locke, from Locke to Hume, and from Hume to Kant. Men become leaders of thought in virtue of the fact that their opinions are in some degree influenced by reason. Thus the progress of speculation may be represented as determined by logical considerations. Each philosopher discovers some of the errors of his predecessor, and advances to some closer approximation to the truth. Though a superficial glance suggests that succeeding thinkers are related rather as antagonists than allies, more careful observation may show that each great man has contributed some permanent element of truth, and that there is thus a continuous, though a very tortuous, advance in speculation. Thought moves in a spiral curve, not in a straight line. But, when we look beyond the narrow circle of illustrious philosophers, we are impressed with the conviction that other causes are at work besides those which are obvious to the logician. Doctrines vanish without a direct assault ; they change in sympathy with a change in apparently remote departments of enquiry ; superstitions, apparently suppressed, break out anew in slightly modified shapes ; and we discover that a phase of thought once, as we fancied, definitively established, is but a superficial modification of an old order of ideas.

4. Before tracing the development of that particular movement of thought of which I am about to sketch the history, it may be well to consider this familiar phenomenon a little more closely. Our knowledge has, in some departments, passed into the scientific stage. It can be stated as a systematic body of established truths. It is consistent and certain. The primary axioms are fixed beyond the reach of scepticism ; each subordinate proposition has its proper place ; and the conclusions deduced are in perfect harmony. If the truths thus established do not conform to any observed phenomenon, we are entitled to infer confidently, not that the doctrine is wrong, but that some disturbing element has escaped our observation. Every new discovery fits into the old system, receiving and giving confirmation. We may arrange our first principles under some wider generalisation, but we

are not called upon to modify their essential truth. The typical case is, of course, that of the mathematical sciences. Euclid's propositions are as true as ever; and the doctrine about floating bodies, which Archimedes discovered in his bath, has not been refuted. The map of human knowledge has here become far wider and more detailed, but the outlines once laid down remain unaltered. If the intellect could thus have always passed from the known to the unknown—if, in every advance to new conquests, its base of operations had always been secure—the whole history of speculation would have been of a similar character.

5. History shows a very different state of facts. In many departments of thought the foundations are still insecure. Men are wrangling as fiercely as ever over metaphysical problems substantially identical with those which perplexed the most ancient Greek sages. The controversial battle has raged backwards and forwards over the old ground, till general weariness, rather than victory, seems likely to conclude the strife. One reason is plain. Some theory about phenomena not yet accurately investigated is necessary in the earliest periods. Before the regularity of the order of nature had ever been asserted, men assumed at every step some principle in which it was more or less implied. When astronomy was scarcely in the embryonic stage, savage races must have had some views as to the recurrence of times and seasons. Even the brutes, we must suppose, have some implicit recognition of the simplest sequences of events; and in the rudest human intellect there are the rudiments of scientific knowledge. But these rudiments are strangely distorted by innumerable errors. In other words, before we know, we are naturally prompted to guess. We must lay down postulates before we arrive at axioms. Most of these, we must suppose, will possess an element of truth. A belief which brought a man into too direct collision with facts would soon disappear along with the believer. An erroneous postulate, however, may survive, if not so mischievous as to be fatal to the agent. Others may stand the test of verification by experience, and may finally take their place as accepted and ultimate truths. The greater number, perhaps, will be materially modified, or will gradually disappear, leaving behind them a residuum of

truth. Thus the progress of the intellect necessarily involves a conflict. It implies destruction as correlative to growth. The history of thought is in great part a history of the gradual emancipation of the mind from the errors spontaneously generated by its first childlike attempts at speculation. Doctrines which once appeared to be simply expressions of immediate observation have contained a hypothetical element, gradually dissolved by contact with facts.

6. To hasten this slow process of disintegration, to dissolve the old associations of ideas, and bring about their crystallisation round a new framework of theory, is a task to be performed slowly and tentatively even by the acutest intellects. Even when the reason has performed its part, the imagination lags behind. We may be convinced of the truth of every separate step in a scientific demonstration, and even be able to grasp it as a whole, and yet the concrete picture which habitually rises before our mind's eye may express the crude old theories which we have ostensibly abandoned. In ordinary moods, we are still in the days of the old astronomy, and unable to believe in the antipodes ; and in moments of poetical feeling, we easily return to the mental condition of the believers in the solar myths. Old conceptions are preserved to us in the very structure of language ; the mass of mankind still preserves its childish imaginations ; and every one of us has repeated on a small scale the history of the race. We start as infants with fetish worship ; we consider our nursery to be the centre of the universe ; and learn but slowly and with difficulty to conform our imaginative constructions to scientific truths. It is no wonder, then, if the belief, even of cultivated minds, is often a heterogeneous mixture of elements representing various stages of thought ; whilst in different social strata we may find specimens of opinions derived from every age of mankind.

7. When opinion has passed into this heterogeneous state, the first step has been taken towards a complete transformation. The two characteristic instincts of the philosopher are the desire for certainty and the desire for harmony. The few in whom a love of speculative truth amounts to a passion seek on the one hand for a solid foundation of unassailable truths, and on the other endeavour to bring all departments of know-

ledge into agreement with established principles. In some minds the desire for unity of system is the more strongly developed; in others the desire for conformity to facts; and during the earlier stages of enquiry the two instincts must be frequently in conflict. So long as our knowledge is imperfect, we shall often have to choose between a want of symmetry and a want of accuracy. In time, we may hope that a definitive philosophy will give full satisfaction to both instincts. That time is doubtless distant; and the more distant because, with the mass of mankind, the love of speculative truth is amongst the weakest of impulses. It is only by slow degrees that the philosopher can hope to disperse the existing prejudices, and extend the borders of his intellectual cosmos over the ancient realms of chaos. We may hope that in the end he will be triumphant; for he has the advantage that his conquests, if slow, are permanent; and the gradual adaptation of the race to its medium, which is the underlying law of development, implies that there is a tendency towards a growing conformity between the world of thought and the world of facts. It is not that every change implies the substitution of truth for error, but that, in the ceaseless struggle, truth has at least the one point in its favour—that when once reached it is more likely to be permanently held. Each established truth may serve as a nucleus round which all further discoveries may gradually group themselves.

8. The purely intellectual impulse is thus of the highest importance, though it corresponds to a feeble desire. When once the process has begun, when a foothold has been obtained by the pioneers of intellectual progress, the process will continue, though often slowly and obscurely, unless the spirit of enquiry be extinguished by tyranny or atrophied by some process of social decay. That the process should be generally slow and obscure follows from the general law of persistence. Old customs and institutions, even of the most trivial kind, linger long after their origin has been forgotten and some new justification has been invented for them. Forms of language and of thought have a similar vitality, and persist long after they are recognised as cumbrous and misleading. Every change must originate with some individual who, by virtue of his originality, must be in imperfect sympathy with the mass

of his contemporaries. Nor can any man, however versatile his intellect, accommodate his mind easily or speedily to a new method and a new order of ideas.

9. A new opinion emerges, as a rule, in regard to some particular fragment of a creed. An acute thinker detects an error of logic, or a want of correspondence between theory and fact. Whilst correcting the error, he does not appreciate the importance of the principles involved. He fancies that he is removing a morbid excrescence when he is cutting into a growth vitally connected with the whole organism. Controversies, which are afterwards seen to involve radically antagonistic conceptions of philosophy, begin by some special and minor corollary. The superficial fissure extends deeper and deeper, until the whole mass is rent in twain. The controversy which began at the Reformation appeared at first to turn upon the interpretation of a few texts: it has spread, until we see that it implicitly involved discussions as to the ultimate groundwork of all human knowledge. Two different modes of conceiving the universe and regulating life were struggling for the mastery. The most heterogeneous forms of opinion are evolved, as such controversies develop themselves and affect minds in the most various stages of culture. The less acute intellects accept incongruous solutions, and admit a principle in one case, which they arbitrarily reject in cases logically identical. Illustrations might be given from every department of thought. One man believes that prayers can retard eclipses; a second laughs at his superstition, but holds that they can hasten fine weather; a third rejects these views, but clings to the belief that the course of a plague, or the issue of a battle, or the development of a character, may be influenced by the same method. People believe in miracles which happened a thousand years ago who would ridicule a miraculous story of to-day. Politicians hold that the suffrage is the inherent right of every human being; and add arbitrary limitations which exclude half or nine-tenths of the species. Free-trade is admitted to be beneficial to each of two provinces or two federal states, and denied to be beneficial if the states become nations. The normal attitude of thought is to be heterogeneous, and therefore unstable. When the key of the position is won, a battle has still to be fought over every

subordinate position. Philosophers, however, may congratulate themselves upon the inconsistency of mankind ; for if it were generally admitted that a principle which is true in one case must be true in all similar cases, philosophy would be crushed in the shell by the antipathies aroused. Philosophers may win their way step by step, because the ordinary mind deals only with special cases, and cares little for the ultimate logical consequences.

10. But philosophers themselves are subject to the same illusions in a scarcely inferior degree. The vulgar accept incoherent conglomerates of inconsistent theories. The philosopher has a more refined procedure for softening the process of transition. The ordinary process is familiar in the history of law. Old rules which are too narrow or clumsy for complex states of society are modified by judicial interpretation without avowed alteration. Legal fictions grow up without a recognition of their fictitious character, as the natural result of the attempt to bring a new class of facts under the old formula. The original nucleus is lost to sight under a mass of accretions and adaptations. Rationalizing is the same process in theology or philosophy. At each particular step it seems that the old rubric is being expanded or confirmed, and that its deeper meaning is being brought out by disregarding trifling changes in the letter ; and though the initial stage of a theory may differ widely from the final, and even, in some most important cases, be almost its logical contradictory, the change at any given moment may be imperceptible. This may perhaps be regarded as the normal process. It is conceivable that the whole series of our conceptions of the universe, from the most savage to the most philosophical, might have been traversed by a continuous and imperceptible process. There are, indeed, critical points at which the change forces itself upon our consciousness, and at which the system, gradually overloaded by the accumulation of new observations and interpretations, requires a complete reorganisation. But the great cause of abrupt changes is the fact that the process proceeds at varying rates in different social strata. The vulgar are still plunged in gross superstitions, from which the educated have definitively emerged. A conflict arises between inconsistent modes of thought, as a

conflict arises between different systems of law, when two races at different points of the scale of development are brought into contact. The philosophic doctrine, misunderstood by the ruder intellect, gives rise to a crude scepticism, which is but another form of superstition, and the attempt to accommodate the hostile systems, no longer unconsciously carried out, but consciously adopted as a device for evading responsibility, may at times lead to downright dishonesty and disregard of the great virtue of intellectual candour.

11. Another process, however, is illustrated by the exceptional class of minds which really delights in novelty. Since truths and errors have become indissolubly associated, the thinker who perceives the error is tempted to abandon the truth. If moral teaching has been for ages connected with a belief in hell, the thinker who sees that hell is a figment sometimes infers that the moral law is not obligatory. The ordinary comment upon such cases is that an excess of credulity engenders an excess of scepticism. Though such oscillations occur, it is more important to observe that we easily exaggerate their amplitude. The most unflinching sceptic really carries with him far more than he knows of the old methods of conception. He inherits the ancient framework of theory, and, unable to find a place in it for his new doctrine, cuts away a large fragment to make room for the favourite dogma. To his contemporaries this sacrilegious act appears to be the most important; it is the mark by which they recognise his peculiar character; to observers at a distance it may appear that his conservatism is really more remarkable than his destructiveness. They wonder more that he should have retained so much than rejected so much. He follows the old method or retains the old conception, though he sees its futility for attaining the old ends. The discord is the result of an incomplete transformation of thought. He gives up hell, but he admits that hell is the only sanction for morality. He retains the old conception of the limited duration of history, though he rejects the old cosmogony which served to justify the conception. He is, therefore, forced to admit a catastrophe, though disbelieving in the mythology which reconciled the imagination to the catastrophe. We are doubtful whether to be more surprised at the boldness

which rejected the old explanation, or at the timidity which retained the old assumptions of fact. The common taunt as to the credulity of sceptics is suggested by such cases. The heretic propounds a heterogeneous system of thought; he admits the validity of part of the orthodox case, whilst explicitly denying the validity of another part. He is, therefore, led into contradictions as glaring as those which he has discovered in the established scheme, whilst their novelty renders them more offensive. The old misconceptions are sanctioned by long association; the contrasts in the novel system of thought are still marked by the glaring crudity of raw conjecture. Thus it constantly happens that the innovator falls into an apparent excess of scepticism simply because he has retained too much of the traditional method. He sees that the old paths are crossed by impassable chasms; and has not yet discovered the existence of other roads to the ancient truths. The general tendency to persistence of ideas is, therefore, illustrated even when we come upon apparent exceptions, though here the shock of transition is intensified, instead of softened, by the tendency to adhere to ancient forms.

12. So far, we have been considering the purely intellectual influences which govern the gradual transformation of accepted theories. The love of abstract truth, the love of consistency, and even the intellectual curiosity which seeks to extend the boundaries of knowledge, are motives which can only be operative in minds of exceptional activity. Any intellectual impulse, however, necessarily sets up a whole series of other changes, more appreciable by the ordinary understanding, and is in turn modified by their influence. The logician may work out his problems without regard to ulterior consequences; but these consequences are the exclusive or predominating considerations in determining the acceptance of his theories by the great mass of mankind. Nor does any creed really flourish in which the faith of the few is not stimulated by the adhesion of the many. What, then, are the main influences, outside of the more logical instincts, which most obviously affect the progress of a new system of thought?

The most obvious of all is the application of any given theory to the material wants of mankind. No creed, as I

have said, can be permanent which does not imply an approximate recognition of many facts. A tribe which had an unlimited faith in the efficacy of charms against poisonous plants or savage beasts would be speedily extinguished. Nature would effectually persecute such heretics. But it is also true that a race may be capable of maintaining itself in spite of the grossest superstitions, or mankind would not be in existence. The savage believes in his charms, but he believes more profoundly in his bow and arrows; and thus, many races survive to the present day which still preserve the intellectual habits of the remotest prehistoric past. Still, an increase of knowledge is, so far, an increase of power. The race which possesses some simple acquaintance with rudimentary truths as to the properties of iron has a point in its favour in the great game of life. It will, probably, end by extirpating its neighbours. And, passing to the other extreme of civilisation, the direct utilitarian value of scientific knowledge has become a great source of power. Not less than in the earlier stages, the race which knows most of the physical laws, and can apply them most effectually, has an advantage in that struggle for existence which is not less keen because its character is concealed amongst civilised races. The more direct influence upon the progress of opinion is equally clear. Not only does the most scientific race flourish, but it comes to believe in science. We may denounce, and very rightly, those coarse forms of utilitarianism which imply an excessive love of mere material advantages; but it is not to be forgotten that the prestige acquired by modern science depends in great measure upon its application to purposes of direct utility. Railways and telegraphs are not everything. Most true! but the prospect of bringing the ordinary creeds of mankind into harmony with scientific conclusions depends, in no small degree, upon the general respect for men of science; and that respect, again, depends materially upon the fact that men of science can point to such tangible results as railroads and telegraphs. We need not fear to admit that, if there is a greater chance now than formerly of the ablest intellects acquiring a definite supremacy, and resisting the constant tendency of mankind to lapse into superstition, it is in great degree because such conquests over the material world can

be appreciated even by the ignorant, and reflect credit upon that system of thought with which they are associated. This utilitarian tendency of modern science is, at the present day, the first and most direct influence in the transformation of opinion.

13. But the influence of a change in the pervading modes of thought acts in other, and perhaps more potent, though less obvious, methods. There is a correlation between the creeds of a society and its political and social organisation. The belief in the supernatural sanctity of a king or a caste, the prevalence of some ethical views as to the nature of marriage, or the true ends of national existence, are essentially necessary for the preservation of a certain order. If the belief is modified, the order becomes unstable or disappears. The forces of cohesion by which men are held together take a different form. Society may thus be radically altered by the influence of opinions which have apparently little bearing upon social questions. It would not be extravagant to say that Mr. Darwin's observations upon the breeds of pigeons have had a reaction upon the structure of European society. It is, however, as clear as it is more important, to remark that the social development reacts upon the creeds. If, for any reason, as from the stimulus caused by a geographical or a scientific discovery, or by the simple accumulation of wealth, a large class becomes dissatisfied with its position, the attempt to remodel its relations to the whole may involve an attack upon the theories implied in the social order. When a natural organ becomes unfitted for its task—when, for example, the rule of a king or a priesthood becomes intolerable, the religion which sanctions their authority will itself be questioned. No great social change, it is probable, can be carried out without stimulating some such process. Or, again, when two races at different stages of progress are brought into contact, not only do the ideas current in each directly affect the ideas of the other, but the whole constitution may be changed, and a redistribution of power modify the theories upon which power reposes. A struggle between two different types of government forces upon each nation a consciousness of its own peculiarities, and may intensify or weaken its characteristic beliefs. The mere realisation of the truth that other forms of faith

beside the Christian were actually flourishing in a great part of the world profoundly altered the established creeds during the period which followed the reawakening of modern Europe. The extension of commercial activity thus influenced the spiritual life. Any great shock, in short, to the social order, or any new relation to the external world, may react upon the creed. If such changes do not suggest new thoughts, they provide a favourable opportunity for the application of new thoughts. The stirring of the soil gives a chance for the growth of the new seeds of thought. Beliefs which have been dormant, or popular only amongst philosophers, suddenly start into reality, and pass from the sphere of remote speculation to that of immediate practice. The more closely we examine recent developments of opinion, the more, I believe, we shall be convinced that the immediate causes of change are to be sought rather in social development than in the activity of a few speculative minds. A complete history of thought would therefore have to take into account the social influences, as well as the logical bearing, of the varying phases of opinion.

14. The fact becomes more striking when we remember that the creed of a race shapes other manifestations besides its industrial activities and its discharge of social functions. It regulates the play of the imagination, and provides expression for the emotions. Life is not entirely occupied in satisfying our material wants, and co-operating or struggling with our fellows. We dream as well as act. We must provide some channel for the emotions generated by contemplation of the world and of ourselves. A creed is partly an attempt at a systematic statement of our knowledge, real or supposed, and partly a more or less poetical embodiment of the feelings which have no direct relation to our actions. In the earlier stages of development the distinction scarcely appears. A child does not distinguish between its dreams and realities. Its fancies and its observations are inextricably blended ; and it cannot lie because it cannot speak the truth. In the infancy of the race, if history is its poetry, it cannot distinguish between the mythology which represents a vague conjecture and the traditions which more or less record facts. The attempt to separate the two elements is the more difficult be-

cause, as I have said, the imagination lags behind the reason, and persists in reproducing the old dreams in indissoluble union with speculations as to facts. When the emotions are roused, the old mode of conceiving the universe revives ; and any attempt to dispute its accuracy is resented as needlessly cruel. The new order, constructed by the reason, remains colourless and uninteresting, because the old associations have not yet gathered round it.

15. Wordsworth expresses the familiar sentiment when he wishes that he could be 'a pagan suckled in some creed outworn.' The sight of Proteus and Triton might restore to the world the long-vanished charm. Now, as far as science is concerned, we are tempted to say that Wordsworth is simply wrong. The Greek mythology gave an inaccurate representation of the facts. The more accurately we know them the better for us. A slight acquaintance with the law of storms is far more useful to the sailor than any guess about a mysterious being, capriciously raising the waves, and capable, perhaps, of being propitiated by charms. From the purely utilitarian point of view, we are the better off the closer the correspondence between our beliefs and the external realities. But, further, we are tempted to say the same even in a poetical sense. Why should Wordsworth regret Proteus and Triton? Because the Greek derived from the sea the existence of beings the contemplation of whose power and beauty was a source of delight to him? But, in the first place, the facts are to Wordsworth what they were to the Greek. If the Greek thought the sea lovely in colour or form, the colour and the form remain. The imaginary being in whom the phenomena were embodied could only be known through the phenomena. The beauty is beautiful still, though we no longer infer an imaginary cause. Nothing is lost but a dream, and a dream, which, by its nature, could only reflect the reality. Why not love the sea instead of loving Proteus, who is but the sea personified? And, secondly, we must add that the dream reflects the painful as well as the pleasurable emotions. When the superstition was a living reality, instead of a poetical plaything, we may be sure that it expressed horror as well as delight. The sailor, imagining a treacherous deity lurking beneath the waves, saw new cause for dread, and

would often have been glad enough to learn that Proteus was a figment.

16. So far as the myth is simply a rough statement of observed facts, we may admit that its disappearance is a clear gain. We may admit, too, that ultimately its disappearance will not be even a loss to the imagination. When the imaginative synthesis has overtaken the logical, when the bare framework of formulæ has gathered round it the necessary associations, we may be able to express our emotions directly as well as by the intervention of a crude hypothesis. And, further, we may agree that accurate knowledge does not ultimately alter the apparent balance of pain and pleasure in the world. The new view will gain as much by dispersing the old gloomy forebodings as it will lose by dispersing chimerical hopes. But it must be also admitted that there is an interval, and a very long interval, of comparatively depressing sentiment. The evil is not that a charm has departed, but that we have lost a mode of expressing our emotions. The old symbols have ceased to be interesting, and we have not gained a new set of symbols. The fact, therefore, that we have dispersed the gloomy along with the cheerful superstitions is not, in this sense, relevant. The mind is quite as much in need of an expression for its fears as of an expression for its hopes. We invert the relation of cause and effect when we consider that our emotions are determined by our imaginative creeds. We are not melancholy because we believe in hell, but we believe in hell because we are melancholy. The hard facts of the world, the misery which is blended with every form of human life and every spring of human action, force us to blend lamentation with rejoicing. A race, struggling for life, pressed by cold, hunger, disease, and the attacks of enemies, may try to console itself by a dreamland of future happiness, but it must also find expression for its forebodings. No creed, therefore, has a widely-spread or continuous vitality which has not embodied all moods of the human mind. Sheer optimism is the least vigorous of beliefs. Believe in a beneficent Creator, and you must also believe in human depravity, and the continued activity of the Devil. Manichæism may be disavowed in words. It cannot be exiled from the actual belief of mankind.

And thus the loss which Wordsworth might fairly lament was not the loss of a mistaken theory about facts, nor the loss of a consoling prospect for the future, but the loss of a system of symbols which could enable him to express readily and vigorously every mood produced by the vicissitudes of human life. In time the loss may be replaced, the new language may be learnt ; we may be content with direct vision, instead of mixing facts with dreams ; but the process is slow, and, till it is completed, the new belief will not have the old power over the mind. The symbols which have been associated with the hopes and fears, with the loftiest aspirations and warmest affections of so many generations, may be proved to be only symbols ; but they long retain their power over the imagination. Not only respect for the feelings of our neighbours, but our spontaneous impulses, will tempt us to worship at the shrines in whose gods we no longer believe. The idol may be but a log of wood ; yet, if it has been for ages the tutelary deity of a race, they will be slow in discovering that it is possible to express their natural sentiment in any form but that of homage to the old god. The importance of some outward and visible symbol of an emotion is evident in all religious and political history—so evident, that many people hold the symbol to be everything, and the symbolised nothing. Some day patriotism may justify itself, but it cannot yet be expressed except in the form of devotion to some institutional fetish, or to a particular flag. The flag you say is but a bit of coloured cloth. Why not manufacture one as it is wanted? Unluckily, or luckily, it is as hard to create a new symbol as to obtain currency for a new word.

17. Thus the gradual ebbing of an ancient faith leaves a painful discord between the imagination and the reason. The idols gradually lose their sanctity ; but they are cherished by poets long after they are disowned by philosophers, and the poet has the greatest immediate influence with the many. In the normal case, therefore, we may assume that the imagination exercises, on the whole, a retarding influence. Science has to appeal to its utilitarian triumphs in order to gain allies against the ancient idolatry. There are, however, times when the emotions take side with the intellect ; when the old symbols have become for large classes associated with

an oppressive power, and have been turned to account for obviously degrading purposes by their official representatives. These are the periods of the moral earthquakes, which destroy an existing order. It must, however, be remarked that, even in such cases, the most vehement reformers generally retain more than they know of the old spirit. They are attacking rather some corollaries than the vital part of the ancient creed ; and an alliance produced by temporary community of purpose between the leaders of the intellectual and the popular revolt may not be so intimate as it appears.

The ultimate victory of truth is a consoling, we may hope that it is a sound, doctrine. If the race gradually accommodates itself to its environment, it should follow that the beliefs of the race gravitate towards that form in which the mind becomes an accurate reflection of the external universe. The closer the correspondence between facts and our mental representation of facts, the more vigorous and permanent should be the creed which emerges. But great forces may work slowly; and it is only after many disturbances and long continued oscillations that the world is moved from one position of equilibrium to another. Progress is the rare exception: races may remain in the lowest barbarism, or their development be arrested at some more advanced stage during periods far surpassing that of recorded history ; actual decay may alternate with progress, and even true progress implies some admixture of decay. The intellectual activity of the acuter intellects, however feeble may be its immediate influence, is the great force which stimulates and guarantees every advance of the race. It is of course opposed by a vast force of inertia. The ordinary mind is indifferent to the thoughts which occupy the philosopher, unless they promise an immediate material result. Mankind resent nothing so much as the intrusion upon them of a new and disturbing truth. The huge dead weight of stupidity and indolence is always ready to smother audacious enquiries. Men of more imagination and finer emotional sensibility are equally inclined to hate the inventor of intellectual novelties. To them the reason presents itself as an 'all-corroding' force, wantonly sapping the foundations of belief, and desecrating all holy symbols. The daring speculator, sufficiently tasked by the effort to escape from his own

prejudices, has a hard struggle against this spontaneous alliance of the grosser and finer natures. His motives are often obscure or hateful, and his theories unintelligible. And yet, if not forcibly silenced, he can find a sufficient fulcrum from which to move the world. He can point, and with increasing confidence, to the immediate practical utility of many of his discoveries. Though a respect for abstract logic is rare, there is such a thing as the logic of facts. Theories once worked into the popular mind, in regard to certain particular cases, spread slowly to the most closely analogous cases, though their wider application is still regarded with horror. His alliance, moreover, though distrusted, is necessary. If the higher intellect of a race is alienated, the popular creed is doomed to decay. The light may be quenched, but only at the cost of ensuring the corruption of creeds, which from that moment lose the principle of vitality. And, finally, the social changes which result from the growth of knowledge and the conquest of the material world necessarily react upon the moral and intellectual order. When the ancient creed no longer satisfies the aspirations of mankind, the philosopher has his chance, and too often fails to turn it to account. For the value of his creed will be tested, not by pure logic, but by trying its efficacy upon men's minds and hearts. The question will be, not only whether the philosophic doctrine can convince men of reason, but whether it can satisfy the imagination ; whether it can afford rules for controlling disorderly passions, and provide a sufficiently vivid imagery for the expression of emotions. Undoubtedly there is a kind of implicit logic in this process. The truer and more complete the creed, the greater, *ceteris paribus*, the chance that it can effectively influence mankind at large. But it may be that men are not yet educated up to the necessary degree of culture, and the higher creed may be ousted by a doctrine less complete and satisfactory, but better fitted for assimilation by the ordinary intellect. The power of the doctrine is tested, we may say, by feeling and acting rather than by reasoning. Will it work? That is the essential question, which is not always answered completely by proving that it is true. In a progressive society a creed which is not advancing is retiring. Unless it is making new conquests, it is falling into disorganisation. And though

one condition of its power is that it should satisfy the keenest intellects, it is also a condition of its full vigour that the enthusiasm of the leaders should be reflected and intensified by their less intelligent followers.

In studying the development of a system of thought, it is essential to remember these conditions, though they may not be the most prominent or the most easily assigned. The logical strength and weakness of the various creeds which were struggling for the mastery during the eighteenth century, goes some way to explain the course of the intellectual history; but no explanation can be complete which does not take into account the social conditions which determined their reception. Truths have been discovered and lost because the world was not ripe for them. If Hume's scepticism was a potent influence at the time, it was not because similar doubts had never occurred to other thinkers, or never been expressed by them, but because the social conditions happened to be favourable to their development. Though I propose to deal chiefly with the logical conditions in the following pages, I shall endeavour to indicate briefly what was that peculiar phase of thought amongst the less accomplished thinkers which decided the fate of the various germs of thought cast upon a more or less fruitful soil.

## II. THE CARTESIAN PHILOSOPHY.

18. The principles thus stated are illustrated by the relation of the metaphysicians to the main currents of thought. Newton laid down mathematical doctrines which were speedily accepted by all mathematicians. To study Newton is therefore to study the history of the mathematical investigation of the time. The difference between his views and those of other enquirers is simply a difference of extent, not of substance. One thinker has more knowledge and a wider intellectual horizon; but all thinkers agree so far as their knowledge goes. If the same statement held true in philosophy, we should simply have to expound the views of Locke and Hume, and to show how those views were developed by later enquirers. The thoughts of the greatest man would include

those of the less, and afford a starting-point for his successors. In fact, however, we have to consider a complex process of antagonistic theorising, where every position is in turn assumed and abandoned, instead of a simple evolution of thought. Yet, to understand the perplexed guesses of the weaker reasoners, we must study the conclusions of the most acute. The metaphysicians did not reach definitive conclusions, or convert the world to their way of thinking ; but it is essential to notice their theories, in order to give some clue to the tangled maze of speculations in which similar opinions were more or less distinctly involved.

19. Men have been arguing metaphysical questions for many centuries without deciding them. Why are these studies, so apparently fruitless, so perennially fascinating? Doubtless because metaphysics is a vague term, including a number of enquiries, some of which lie beyond the legitimate sphere of reason, but which, once disengaged from these hopeless puzzles, would clear up the most important of all problems. Under metaphysics we include a number of ontological, theological, ethical, psychological, and logical enquiries. What is this world in which we live? What are the ultimate limits of knowledge? How can it be increased? From what principles must we start? What methods must we apply? What are the rules to be deduced from the conduct of life? If we could answer these questions, we could satisfy the demands of the intellect for a firm basis of knowledge and a systematic co-ordination of all discoverable truth. But here, as elsewhere, the process is slow and complex. The true theory is reached by blundering into every possible error. We shall find an infallible guide after following every *ignis fatuus* that crosses our path. How to enquire? Enquire successfully, and then we shall know. The old saying *crede ut intelligas* may be annexed by philosophy. The value of a belief is tested by applying it. The method which has discovered truths and interpreted phenomena is the method to follow. Now that a certain body of truths has been definitely conquered, we are beginning to appreciate the significance of the answer; but innumerable efforts had been made to anticipate it, and to take the dark riddle by storm. In the middle of the seventeenth century the philosophy of Descartes had

given an answer which, like others, before and since, has ceased to satisfy men's minds, but which determined the starting-point of much English speculation. The unsatisfactory nature of the method was already indicated by the ambiguity of the results.

20. Philosophy was still in close alliance with theology. The doctrine accepted alike by the reason and the imagination was that the world was created, governed, and sustained, by a Supreme Being of infinite perfection. Though we might point to instances of sporadic scepticism, to individual thinkers who had more or less distinctly attacked the basis of theological belief, this conception was adopted, however variously interpreted, by all the great thinkers. To retain it in some shape was felt to be essential to the highest moral, social, and intellectual needs of mankind. The alternative to theology seemed to be universal scepticism. All truth was guaranteed by our trust in the divine truthfulness; all knowledge was harmonised when the shifting phenomena of the phenomenal world were regarded as manifestations of the divine will. Strike away this central truth, and chaos would come again; truth be unattainable, and the world a blind congeries of shifting and changing forces.

21. One curious phenomenon follows. The interest of all metaphysical enquiry is summed up in its bearing upon these central questions. Opposite metaphysical systems should lead, one might fancy, to opposite results. Deny the primary data and the logical method of a philosopher, and you must surely arrive at a different conclusion. Yet in practice the same conclusion seems to be reached by all roads. The question was not, is this doctrine proved, but how is it proved? Thus we find Descartes elaborately declaring his belief in Catholicism; Malebranche, the disciple, and Gassendi, the opponent, of Descartes, were both Catholics; Leibnitz was a Lutheran. If Spinoza and Hobbes were accused of Atheism, each of them sanctioned his speculations by the sacred name of theology. In England, Locke, though attacking the Cartesian philosophy, was a theologian and a sincere if latitudinarian Christian; Berkeley assaulted the older philosophy expressly and most sincerely and passionately in the interests of theology; Hume argued that the premisses admitted by

Locke and Berkeley led to conclusions irreconcilable with their theology; and Reid—so far agreeing with Hume—attacked their premisses in order to support their conclusions. And, finally, Hartley, the materialist founder of a school which altogether repudiated theology, argued in the interests of Christianity. Each philosophical school imputes Atheism to its antagonists, and declares its own method to afford the only sound basis for theology. In fact, the theological interpretation so swayed the imagination that philosophy spontaneously sought for its protection. The freed intellect begins by proving assumptions hitherto taken for granted. It appears as the ally or the servant of the imagination before daring to assume an independent attitude. And thus, we have at once the source of perplexity that all reasoners are evidently swayed to some extent by a foregone conclusion. We cannot take for granted that even the most candid reasoners are unreservedly abandoning themselves to a purely logical impulse.

22. Descartes' initial principle of provisional scepticism was intended to exclude this danger of possible prepossession. He resolved to doubt whatever could be doubted. Propositions which proved to be insoluble under this process, carefully and systematically applied, were to be regarded as definitively established. Here was the solid rock upon which to erect a flawless and imperishable creed, free from the futile logomachies of the old scholasticism. Descartes, in fact, denies the dogma of authority which asserts more or less clearly that a doctrine is to be believed simply because other people have believed it. Every traditional faith was to have its credentials strictly scrutinised before its soundness could be admitted. Reason, in fact, is openly asserting its claims to be a judge of supreme and independent authority, instead of a mere assessor in the court of authority. The doctrine was gradually working its way to recognition throughout the century, though Descartes himself shrank from certain obvious applications.

23. This, however, is the negative side of the doctrine. Descartes did something more than protest against a blind submission to arbitrary authority. When resolving to test by his new method all existing beliefs, he did not in fact doubt that some such residuum as he sought would be discovered.

He did not really expect that the provisional would have to be converted into an absolute scepticism. The method, indeed, already indicates the character of the truths which will be discovered. It is likely to disperse any doctrines articulately stated in the dogmatic form, and of which it is evident, upon inspection, that they rest upon prescription rather than reason. But it is less likely to be efficacious as against doctrines which have insinuated themselves more thoroughly, because by subtler methods. A belief which is implied in the very mode of conceiving the universe, which the philosopher, like other men, had unconsciously imbibed from his infancy, might easily pass itself off as implied in the very structure of the mind. The only test for discovering the true nature of such beliefs is afforded by the comparative method, which enables us to trace their origin and development in minds different from our own. But this mode of examination was implicitly repudiated by Descartes' first principle. The individual mind is regarded as competent to test the validity of its own beliefs by a process of direct inspection. Descartes, therefore, assumes that it is possible—and he of course converts the possibility into an actuality—that we may discover in the mind some 'innate ideas' and first principles which are a sufficient evidence for themselves. This doctrine might take various forms to evade the criticism of opponents; but in some shape or other it is implied in all the philosophical speculations to which Descartes gave the impulse, that, by passing under review the contents of our minds, we can discover some primary truths, which either reveal themselves, or are recognised as soon as revealed, and which have a validity altogether transcending that of any knowledge acquired by experience. They need no further test than their inherent clearness; and to deny them is to fall into a contradiction in terms.

24. The method thus announced seemed to be sanctioned by a great precedent. Mathematical knowledge was at that time not merely the typical example of deductive reasoning, but the only department of science which had been pushed far beyond its rudiments. It was natural to infer, as was inferred by Descartes and his whole school, that mathematics exhibited the normal process of all philosophy. If other

sciences had not advanced equally, it was because in them men had not been faithful to the same methods of speculation. Now mathematics start from certain primary axioms which may be plausibly regarded as independent of all experience. If we know things as they are, or recognise truths independently of experience, the knowledge must necessarily be the same in every man. It is easy to invert the argument, and say what is the same to every man must be independent of experience. Every man agrees in the first principles of mathematics; therefore a mathematical truth is independent of the personal peculiarities which determine this or that man's intellectual conceptions; and therefore it is again inferred, it is independent of all men's modes of conception, or it is a universal and absolute truth. From the primary axioms of mathematics are evolved a vast body of mutually coherent truths, each of which has equal validity with the primary truths. The mathematician defines a curve, and by the help of his axioms deduces the most remote properties. Let the metaphysician once discover the axioms suitable to his problems, and define with equal clearness the conceptions with which he is to deal, and he will be able to construct a science as complete and unalterable as that of the mathematician.

25. That is the vision which Descartes endeavoured to realise, and one difficulty immediately occurs. The mathematician might argue with confidence about his triangles (or so it seemed) without troubling himself to enquire whether there ever was or ever could be a triangle in the world. The propositions are certainly true on the hypothesis that there are triangles, for they flow by a logical necessity from the very definition of triangles. But to make the logic useful, we must know that the idea has a counterpart in reality. In the same way metaphysicians might construct a complete logical framework without being certain that it had any more substance than a dream. Hence the first step is to find a point of contact with reality. Once get hold of a reality, and then we have a firm centre from which our knowledge may spread along every line of thought. The logical nexus by which the properties of the idea are inferred from its definition must correspond to a causal nexus by which the properties of the object are evolved from its essence.

Given the reality of space, and our geometry must correspond to fact. The celebrated *je pense, donc je suis*, supplies us with one such reality—namely, ourselves; and by a more laborious and more easily assailable reasoning, Descartes endeavours to exhibit the other great idea—God—as proving its own reality. We have only to contemplate it to be forced to acknowledge that it corresponds to the fact which lies at the centre of the universe.

26. Another discovery follows—What is our self? It is the single, indivisible, and therefore indestructible unit, which we call the soul, and from the very mode of proof it is evident that the essence of the soul is thought. Knowing the nature of the soul by direct intuition, we also know the nature of its necessary opposite—matter. For matter must be that which does not think, and, further, must be that abstraction which exists under all the varying forms of the visible world. Matter, that is, becomes almost identical with space. Its essence is extension, though we may perhaps throw in the quality of impenetrability, just, as we may say, to stiffen it into the necessary consistency. Matter, in short, is simply the world as conceived by the pure mathematician in his dealings with geometry and mechanics. All other qualities vary from man to man; and it is plain, therefore, that we cannot know them as they are.

27. Here then we have our realities. The antithesis between subject and object is represented by the two absolute substances—the soul and matter; whilst God, the eternal and self-existent substance, sustains and regulates their relations. And now, having the necessary starting-point, we might proceed to deduce the world from our ideas, in full security that the ideas must correspond to facts. But here, unluckily, occurs the great difficulty which perplexed Descartes and his followers. What is the soul? It is the opposite of matter, and utterly devoid of all material qualities. And what is matter? It is the opposite of the soul, and by no alteration or manipulation can thought be got out of it. If so, how are we to bridge over the gulf between two contradictories? How are we to conceive of any reciprocal action between the two or of one upon the other? All our reasoning is to be guaranteed by the absolute clearness of our ideas; and yet,

here at the very root of the system is a fatal contradiction. The action of any being upon another must follow from their definitions; yet the definitions show that matter cannot be brought into relation to spirit, whilst all scientific knowledge rests on their mutual connection. The difficulty suggested various so-called solutions, which really admit it to be insuperable by calling in the aid of the Deity. Matter, it was suggested, does not affect the soul, but when a change happens in one, God causes a change in the other; or, the soul cannot be directly conscious of matter, but 'sees all things in God;' or, the soul and matter are like two separate clocks wound up by God to go in perfect correspondence. Thinking, and the object of thought, being torn asunder by the metaphysical analysis, God is introduced as the correlating and unifying principle. But a philosophy which begins by making a difficulty only to be overcome by Omnipotence might well alarm sober minds.

28. The primary source of the perplexities thus evolved is doubtless to be traced back to the earliest periods of speculation, and indeed of conscious reason. To reason is to educe order and permanence out of the shifting chaos apparently presented by that shifting world of phenomena,

> Where nought abiding is but only change.

The records of primeval thought, the very structure of human language, indicate the nature of the first attempts to organise experience. Language implies classification. The world of the senses is regarded as made up of individuals, capable of being arranged in certain classes. Both classes and individuals can be contemplated as permanent objects of thought, and therefore as the subject-matter of true propositions. But here occurs one series of interminable questions. To say that a proposition is true is to say that our thoughts correspond to the facts. Which, then, are the facts and which are our thoughts? How, in the technical language of metaphysicians, are we to draw the line between the objective and the subjective element of knowledge? It was inevitable that early thinkers should blunder in the attempt to solve those ever-recurring problems upon which generations of acute metaphysicians have exhausted their utmost acuteness. Looking, in

the first place, at the external world, nothing seems simpler than the idea corresponding to the name of an individual object, man, or tree, or stone. But the name implies a whole series of difficulties. The man and the tree change visibly at every moment; if the stone does not change so rapidly, we discover that its qualities are at every instant dependent upon certain conditions which vary, however slowly. All things, as the old sceptics said, are in ceaseless flux; and yet, to find truth, we must find something permanent. The ordinary mind assumes that the thing corresponding to the name remains unaltered, whilst some of its qualities change. Is there a thing more than the sum of its qualities; and, if so, what more? The assumption that the name corresponds to some persistent entity roughly solves the difficulty of reconciling change and permanence. For the picture of the world as it actually presents itself, a picture in which every minutest fragment gradually blends with its neighbours, and changes in response to changes at the remotest regions, we have, it may be said, a kind of mosaic-work, made up of little bits, each separate, homogeneous and permanent, and producing the effect of continuity when not too closely examined. We cannot even speak without using this hypothesis, or, therefore, without implying some, however infinitesimal, inaccuracy. If language is taken to be more than an approximation, we have at once a source of error. The simple statement 'this is John or Thomas' implies an error, for it implies that the thing called John or Thomas remains identical, whilst some of its qualities are altered.

29. Another difficulty follows. If, as language seems to imply, a thing can be contemplated apart from its relations, how are things bound together? We separate the two terms in imagination, and assume that they can exist apart in reality. The very mechanism of language forces us to say fire burns or man lives. We assume that 'fire' may exist without burning, and 'man' without life. But, as experience presents all things as related, we must restore the broken link. The confusion between subject and object again introduces itself. The separate fragments are connected by an anthropomorphic bond. A being, like ourselves, is supposed to be working behind the facts and keeping the separate

objects in relation. In some primitive stages of thought the fire is endowed with human passions. Elsewhere, a more or less transfigured human being is assumed to be guiding the rain-cloud and hurling the thunderbolt. Here we have, then, a principle of order and unity to bring together the separated fragments. To interpret to ourselves even our own unity, we imagine man to be inhabited by another man, who somehow survives the changes of the organism. In such assumptions we have the germs of all the metaphysical puzzles of later times. As men are forced to recognise the constant interdependence of all phenomena, they save the permanent element by making it a more and more abstract entity. One by one, each changeable quality is stripped off, till a mere *caput mortuum* is left behind as a metaphysical substance. The world of the senses is 'unreal' because changeable, and reality is banished to the metaphysical region lying behind all possible experience. The forces which bind the separate atoms together become less and less anthropomorphic, and as the supposed real beings fade into empty concepts, the uniting powers become occult qualities, supposed somehow to inhere in the substances. The causal nexus, that is, is regarded as a power which inheres in one body even when not actually exerted. A correlative process must take place in the internal world. To find reality is to find the permanent thing which remains when all qualities of a perceived object are changed. To find truth must be to find a proposition which remains in spite of all changes in the perceiving subject. We have to eliminate the error due to the presence of a 'subjective' element. Now 'subjective' means either the element which varies from one individual to another, or that which depends upon the nature common to the race. It is possible to get rid of the first element, or we could frame no general propositions. The existence of language implies that phenomena may be described in terms which will be accurate for all who can speak. It is true for all men everywhere and always, that two sides of a triangle are greater than the third. But it is supposed to be possible to get rid of the subjective element in the other sense; to describe things not only as they appear to everyone, but as they are 'in themselves.' This is but another case of the illusion already

noticed. Separating the two terms of the relation, each is supposed to have an independent existence. The thing exists independently of its qualities. The idea, or the relation between two ideas, exists independently of the perceiving mind. All knowledge based upon experience implies a co-operation between two factors, the objective and subjective. But 'subjective' is taken to mean 'unreal,' therefore the only true truth is that which exists independently of the subjective factor; or, in other words, the truth which is known as we cannot know it. The knowledge, then, must be of a miraculous nature, for it exists independently of conditions. And thus, as external reality is to be found only in facts lying outside of all possible observation, so truth is to be found only in propositions lying outside all possible experience. As the objects are bound together by a transcendental nexus, the truths are combined by a transcendental logic. The knowledge thus obtained is absolute, for it is independent of all conditions either of external or internal origin. We seek for the substance which underlies all substances and the truth which lies beneath all reason. If we cannot find them, we implicitly pronounce truth and reality to be unattainable and undiscoverable.

30. These remarks may roughly give the genesis of the various assumptions of the Cartesian method. The doctrines of innate ideas, of the three transcendental substances, of causation, and of necessary truths form part of a coherent system. It is assumed that, unless you can get a faculty which discovers the ultimate truths which lie behind reason, truth must in some sense depend upon the structure—physical or spiritual—of the organism—that is to say, it must be subjective or fictitious. Unless you can perceive realities as they are not revealed to our perceptive faculties—that is to say, unless you can discover unperceivable perceptions—you are not in presence of facts, but of phantasms. Unless you can know causes as they inhere in these objects, and exist even in the absence of the conditions which lead to their being displayed to experience—that is to say, unless you can know inactive activities—you know no real cause, but a series of accidents. If the mind cannot discover *a priori* truths which connect the passive ideas, and which explain the very process

of reason, its associations will be only customary, not reasonable. The various difficulties were brought out by three great thinkers. Locke attacked the theory of innate ideas; Berkeley attacked the doctrine of substance and the theory of generalisation implied in it. Hume's assault, though directed against the whole system, produced the most conspicuous effects in regard to causation. I must state the positions of these thinkers in rather greater detail; but at present it is enough to emphasise the fact that here—as in most cases—the writers inherited the assumptions of the dogmatists. They admitted, that is, that, if the doctrine of innate ideas and the doctrines based upon it were destroyed, the legitimate result would be scepticism—that is to say, the admission that truth was undiscoverable. Locke and Berkeley saved themselves by not carrying out their assault logically. Hume became a thorough sceptic, as he was bound to do by his logic. Hume, therefore, agrees with Descartes in assuming that truth was only obtainable as Descartes supposed himself to have obtained it. He differed from him in maintaining that the method of Descartes involved insurmountable contradictions. He further agrees with Descartes and all his predecessors in pursuing the simple introspective method; that is to say, in attempting to discover truth by simply contemplating his own mind. But, unlike Descartes, he finds no permanent basis for truth in his contemplations; for, indeed, in the mind itself he finds nothing, scarcely even a faculty, and therefore he pronounces truth to be unobtainable.

31. One great thinker pushed the Cartesian doctrine to its logical results; to results, indeed, so logical as to cover him with infamy. Philosophers repudiated deductions, so inevitable and so intolerable, by swelling the popular outcry against the 'atheist.' Spinoza was unpardonably thoroughgoing. If we are to apply the mathematical analogy, it is obvious that we must have the mathematician's advantages. The mathematician is coherent and conclusive because his reasonings are, so to speak, in one place. The geometrician deals with our conceptions of space, and does not jump from the properties of triangles to the properties of thought, or even of chemical combinations. His subject matter is perfectly homogeneous, instead of being made up of perfectly

disparate orders of existence. The metaphysician, then, would be in an analogous position if he could argue about a single substance. Each of the three substances recognised by the Cartesians is described as a negation in some sense of the other; but the positive qualities by which they are distinguished from pure being are not mutually exclusive, but disparate. Suppose, then, that we regard these qualities as being in some sense attributes of a single substance, shall we not get rid of the negation? God, let us say, is the sole substance of the universe; he has infinite attributes; the soul is God, known under the attribute of thought; and matter is God, as known under the attribute of extension. The difficulty of securing the co-operation of soul and matter disappears; for, to use a rough comparison, as there is necessarily a perfect correspondence between lightning and thunder, because the same disturbance causes the sound to the ear and the light to the eye, so the underlying cause will manifest itself in two different spheres as spiritual and material. Granting this, everything falls into its proper place. The internal and external world are necessarily counterparts. The connection and order of ideas are identical with the connection and order of things. God is the first great cause, and the knowledge of God's existence the primary axiom; all events follow from the nature of the self-existent Being, as corollaries in Euclid follow from the first propositions; and therefore, so far as our knowledge is 'adequate,' all truths may be developed from the self-evident principle, as parts of one consistent whole. Thus the universe is the incarnation of logic. We have the highest certainty, for we know that the absolute cause exists beyond all changes, and the most perfect harmony, for the remotest truth is but a corollary from the highest.

32. Later writers have wondered—I think rather superfluously—at the injustice which has connected the name of atheist with the man who has also been called the 'god-intoxicated.' If Atheism is taken to connote a disbelief in virtue, in universal order, or in the possibility of attaining truth, no man ever lived to whom the title was less appropriate. But if Atheism means a mode of conceiving the universe which is radically inconsistent with the old theology, the name is no longer so inappropriate. The God of the

churches is separate from the universe ; he must punish and reward, create and destroy, and interpose at intervals to alter the working of the established order. The conception disappears equally whether the existence of God or not-God be denied. The divine power seems to become a factor which enters on both sides of every equation, and may therefore be omitted. We may place at the head of any system of reasoning the proposition A=A ; but to most people it seems to be rather superfluous ; and so Spinoza's universal theism seems to the ordinary theist to be no theism at all. The God of Spinoza is pure Being ; and though Spinoza retains for this abstraction the reverence due to the concrete Person of popular theology, and exhibits his doctrine as a system of ethics, the ordinary mind fails to regard his deity as an object capable of exciting emotion or guiding conduct. The doctrine is, meanwhile, the more dangerous because it points to the natural euthanasia of theology. Every theological system tends to glide into pantheism, and by exalting and widening the conception of deity to render it nugatory. Theologians, therefore, may well dread the insidious alliance of the Spinozist even more than the direct hostility of the atheist.

33. In England, the philosophical impulse of Descartes made no distinguished disciples. John Norris, the author of the 'Ideal World'—a second-rate adaptation of Malebranche —seems to be the only exception to the general indifference. The English mind, for some reason, is generally averse to the 'high *a priori* road,' and moves awkwardly and timorously when forced to take it. The result is, too frequently, that the English representative of such a system preserves the essential errors without attaining to the logical symmetry of his originals. His sense that the foundations are insecure does not deter him from building; but he somehow fancies that, by making his edifice clumsy and unpretentious, he can secure it from collapse. In England, therefore, we find a philosophy which is half ashamed of itself, but which yet involves the same fundamental assumptions. Many English writers of the time had the same conception of a possible body of metaphysical truths framed upon the mathematical analogy. They reason on the same principles as to

the nature of matter, the soul and God. They do not reproduce Descartes' proof of the existence of God, having, it is probable, some difficulty in comprehending it; but they are confident that some solid proofs may be constructed which will do equally well, and those which they offer imply the same radical conceptions. Though the Cartesian philosophy failed to obtain complete naturalisation, a less systematic acceptance of similar views, reposing upon similar methods of conception, was thus familiar to English thinkers. It expresses itself, in particular, in the theology of the rationalising school, whether Christian or deist. The danger in one direction of sliding into pantheism, and in another of making an historical revelation superfluous, cramps the intellects of these reasoners. The orthodox divine fears to become a mere deist, and the deist fears lest his theology should fade into pantheism. We shall have to trace in detail the working of these principles in the deist controversy. Here it is enough to remark that the whole essence of the deist position may be found in Spinoza's 'Tractatus Theologico-Politicus.' A few of the philosopher's pages have expanded into volumes and libraries of discussion; but the germs of the whole discussion are present. Few of the deists, it is probable, read his works;[1] the name of Spinozism was of course dreaded by them; they take care both to avoid the imputation, and to make it undeserved by carefully scotching their logic. The immutable chain of causation recognised by Spinoza is summarily broken off by the dogmatic assertion of Free-will, which became a mark of the whole deist and semi-deist school. The legitimate descent of their theories is not the less manifest. And we may therefore note as an essential element in the subsequent evolution of thought, that the English rationalism of the eighteenth century, so far as it represented a constructive impulse, was founded upon a decayed system of philosophy. The assumptions from which it started and the methods which it employed had already been expounded by more daring and consistent thinkers. When hard experience has proved a philosophy to be sterile, a religious movement founded upon it suffers from deeply-seated delicacy of constitution.

[1] Toland is probably an exception. See his Letters to Serena.

### III. THE ENGLISH CRITICISM.

34. The critical movement initiated by Locke and culminating with Hume reflects the national character. The strong point of the English mind is its vigorous grasp of facts; its weakness is its comparative indifference to logical symmetry. English poetry is admirable, because poetry thrives upon a love of concrete imagery; whilst Englishmen have always despised too indiscriminately the dreams of a mystical philosophy which seems to be entirely divorced from the solid basis of fact. In metaphysical speculation their flights have been short and near the ground. They have knocked pretentious systems to pieces with admirable vigour; they have been slow to construct or to accept systems, however elaborately organised, which cannot be constantly interpreted into definite statements and checked by comparison with facts. As one consequence, we perhaps underrate our own philosophical merits. Comparing Locke, or his successors, with the great German writers, we are struck by the apparently narrow, fragmentary, and inconsistent views of our countrymen. If the merit of a philosopher were to be exhaustively measured, not by the number of fruitful principles, but by the variety and order of his applications of his principles, Locke and his successors would occupy a low position. If the courage which passes over a difficulty in order to frame a system be more admirable than the prudence which refuses to proceed beyond clearly established principles, they must be content with a secondary rank. Nor is it doubtful that our dislike to pretentious elaboration often blinds us to the merit of the more daring speculators whose width of view has stimulated thought even whilst covering many fallacious generalities. Yet I believe that the merits of our shrewd and sober, if narrow and one-sided, speculation, will be more highly valued as we recognise the futility of the cloudy structures which it has dissipated.

35. Locke is in this sense a typical Englishman. He became the intellectual ruler of the century; and for the next two generations the English name was identified by the free-

thinkers of the Continent with Locke, liberty, and philosophy. By Locke appears to have been generally meant the denial of innate ideas. And though the general impression that this denial constituted the whole sum and substance of his philosophy may be sometimes taken as a symptom that the eulogist had not got beyond the opening pages of the essay, the popular instinct was probably right. Locke objected to all the existing philosophy, as Descartes objected to the scholastic philosophy, on account of its tendency to run into mere logomachy. The method by which Descartes would escape from the old labyrinth was the rejection of all ideas not clear and all truths not self-evident. Thus would be obtained a firm basis for a mathematically coherent system. But this test, though sound in itself, was not sufficient. The discussions of the Cartesians about the relations of matter and the soul, their attempts to evolve the universe out of their own consciousness, and to pronounce upon questions incapable by their nature of being brought to any definite test, showed the source of the error. The old scholastic fallacies were reviving, and to apply an effectual remedy it was necessary to call in the test of experience. Ideas, it was plain, might be clear and coherent, and yet have no reference to facts. An imaginary world may be constructed behind the real world, which may be as symmetrical and coherent as we please. Nay, any number of such worlds may be constructed; and nobody can say which, if any, is the real one. Leibnitz's monadology may be a true system; but, also, it may not; and our faculties do not enable us to say whether it is or is not. Locke, therefore, began rightly by exorcising the spirit of false philosophy. Get rid of the ideas which do not correspond to actual facts, and of the truths which cannot be tested by experience, and philosophy will be restrained once and for ever from these fruitless and endless attempts to raise its flight above the atmosphere. The theory of innate ideas supplied the basis from which these flights were made; and Locke, therefore, rightly attacked innate ideas. In banishing them, indeed, he was really banishing more than he intended. He argued against a crude form of a theory which had in it an element of truth; and his answer could therefore not be final. Doctrine took a more refined shape, to be met again by more

refined forms of Locke's arguments. For the present it is enough to say that he really aimed at the most exposed gap in his opponents' armour, and destroyed for ever the assumptions on which the older forms of ontological speculation were necessarily based.

36. Locke's victory was decisive and of vital importance; but he did not fully reap its fruits. His inconsistency is characteristic, and served to recommend him to his contemporaries. He fancied that the old system, or large fragments of it, might survive the attack upon its vital principle, and his uncertainty is curiously exhibited in his view of the fundamental ideas of the Cartesian cosmology. No one was less inclined than Locke to attack the fundamental tenets of theology; and yet, the idea of God is with Descartes the chief instance of innate ideas, and would be in danger of disappearing with them. Now Locke, as we shall hereafter see, was profoundly sensible of the futility of theological scholasticism; indeed, it was probably that form of scholasticism which chiefly excited his indignation, as its practical effects had been most disastrous. But he was as anxious to preserve a purified and rational theology as to limit futile speculations into the inscrutable and mysterious tenets of theology. His attack upon innate ideas must not be allowed to weaken the proof of God's existence. As a philosopher he argues elaborately that we have no innate idea of God, and holds that the absence of so important an idea is a strong presumption against innate ideas generally.[1] But as a theological philosopher, he argues that we can prove the existence of God as certainly as we can prove that the angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles. The proof upon which he chiefly insists is the proof from causation,[2] though he, of course, admits others, and does not deny the validity even of the Cartesian proof. Cause, as Hume presently showed, was a doubtful foundation in Locke's system; but of that Locke was unconscious. His attitude towards the soul is rather more sceptical. He denies that the soul always thinks; he gave great offence by declaring that we could not tell without revelation whether the soul were immaterial or immortal;[3] and his theory that

[1] Locke's 'Essay,' book i. ch. iv. § 8 to 17. [2] Ib. book iv. ch. x.
[3] Ib. book iv. ch. iii., and 'First Letter to Stillingfleet.'

personal identity consisted in consciousness[1] threw a suspicion even upon the soul's unity and continuity. His theory in regard to the third great idea is, however, of more importance. His doctrine, that we have but 'an obscure and relative idea of substance in general,'[2] is illustrated by one of those happy comparisons which Locke not unfrequently strikes out. The 'Indian and tortoise' has become a stock metaphor in our literature, and seems to imply that of absolute substance we can by no possibility know anything. But Locke accepted[3] and developed at length the distinction between primary and secondary qualities to recognise the possibility of that kind of knowledge which he seems to disclaim. The primary qualities—solidity, extension, figure, motion, or rest, and number, according to his first numeration[4]—are those which are inseparable from matter generally. This presently becomes identified with the proposition that the primary qualities are really in bodies, 'whether our senses perceive them or no; whereas light, heat, and secondary qualities no more exist in them than "sickness or pain" in manna.'[5] Here, then, Locke is following the philosophy which he assailed. He, like Descartes, is trying to get outside of himself. His distinction assumes that universal perceptions must be independent not only of the constitution of this or that man, but of the constitution of man generally.

37. Enough has been said to exhibit the inconsistent character of Locke's position. Attacking the theory of innate ideas, he yet retains conceptions vitally associated with that theory. We know of a being who cannot be manifested through the senses, though all our knowledge comes through the senses; and, similarly, we know some qualities, not merely as they are manifested to us, but as they exist in themselves. When such contradictions run through his whole system, it is not surprising that Locke's theory of reality and truth becomes confused. It is enough to point out that, in conformity with his other views, he admits that all natural science is radically uncertain. The secondary' qualities being in

[1] Locke's 'Essay,' book ii. ch. xxvii. § 9, &c. [2] Book ii. ch. xxiii. § 3.

[3] On the previous history of this celebrated distinction see Sir W. Hamilton's note to Reid. Reid's Works, p. 825.

[4] Book ii. ch. viii. § 9. [5] Ib. § 18.

some sense unreal, all the knowledge conversant with them must be uncertain, and it would be a contradiction to suppose that we could discover a 'necessary' connection between them and the primary qualities, for that connection can by its very nature be only discoverable from experience.[1] Certainty is only derivable, as he constantly insists, from the comparison of ideas in our minds. As we can never trace the connection between the ideas and the external or primary qualities which somehow produce them, we can never obtain true knowledge in regard to the sense-given experience. 'In physical things scientifical knowledge will still be out of our reach.' We are, then, already on the road to scepticism, for it is admitted that sense gives no certainty, and yet all other avenues of knowledge are closed. Locke imagines that he has only removed the points which support useless excrescences where he has really struck at the foundations of a system.

38. Locke's attack upon the existing philosophy was prompted, as it would seem, partly by his sturdy English contempt for philosophical logomachy, and partly by his special contempt for its theological embodiment. Berkeley, his intellectual successor, joined to Locke's hatred for jargon a more directly theological impulse. He thinks that philosophers are apt to raise a dust, and then complain that they cannot see,[2] and he speaks contemptuously of the schoolmen, whose authority yet lingered in the Universities.[3] But his more direct purpose is the confutation of 'sceptics and atheists' —against whom he proclaims war in the title-page to the 'Three Dialogues,' and especially against all whom he takes to be materialists.[4] Materialism, in an overt shape, was scarcely a common phase of doctrine at the time, though represented by the dreaded name of Hobbes; but Berkeley might be naturally impressed by some parts of the Cartesian conception. The universe was split into two parts. On one side was the spiritual atom called the soul. On the other the huge dead machinery of matter worked by mechanical laws. The insuperable difficulty of bringing these two opposite theories into harmony was indicated by the desperate attempts of such writers as Leibnitz and Malebranche to introduce a permanent

[1] Book iv. ch. iii. § 26; and iv. ch. xii. § 9, &c.
[2] Works, i. 138.
[3] Ib. i. 148.
[4] Ib. i. 205, 305.

miracle. Berkeley might fear that the soul would have the worst of it in the struggle ; for when all phenomena, including those of the human body, were explained by the properties of matter, which had at least certain mathematical attributes, the soul, which had no attribute at all except the attribute of thought, might be omitted as superfluous, or reduced to be a mere spectator of the vast machinery, amidst whose wheels and levers it was hopelessly ensconced. To destroy matter, then, was to free the soul. Berkeley did not devote much attention, like his contemporary Jonathan Edwards, to the problem of fate and free-will, and when he touches upon the subject his arguments are beneath his standard. He believed in the freedom of the will ; but his dread was not so much of necessity as of that hideous necessity embodied in the laws of dead matter. He wished to get rid of this gigantic corpse, whose stifling embraces threatened the annihilation of the living and percipient subject. The purpose of his writings explains the curious limitation of his philosophy. He brought out with admirable acuteness, and almost unsurpassed literary skill, the contradictions inherent in the conception of matter as an unperceivable perception. He attacked the theory of abstraction involved in this conception, in order to show that, when every quality had been picked out of a supposed substance, the residuum was—nothing. An abstract idea was, according to him, simply the idea of an individual object regarded as symbolical of other objects. And, finally, he exposed the fallacy of Locke's mode of distinguishing between the primary and secondary qualities of matter. There is equally a subjective element in both, if subjective be taken in its wider sense. The conception of space depends upon the subject as much as the conception of colour. If the secondary qualities are to be called unreal on account of the co-operation of the human organisation, so must the primary. But there was one side of his speculative position to which Berkeley—flushed with his triumphant expulsion of matter from the universe—paid too little attention. The vulgar perversion of his reasoning represented him as bound in consistency to run his head against a post. Berkeley not only repudiated this doctrine, but claimed that the common sense of mankind—when rightly interrogated—

was upon his side. His theory was the true antidote to scepticism; for, according to him, the ideas present to our minds were realities, whilst, according to other philosophers, they were the unreal representatives of unknowable objects. But it is still possible that, though Berkeley drew no sceptical inference from his system, the legitimate inference was sceptical. Where, in fact, does he find truths and realities? If matter vanishes, should not its correlative soul disappear with it? If we perceive nothing but 'ideas,' meaning by 'ideas' a series of sensations significant only of each other, how can we obtain the knowledge of the God who is hidden from our senses? The answer is remarkable, and exhibits the connecting link between the philosophy of Locke and Hume.

39. Berkeley displays his whole logical skill, especially in the admirable Dialogues, to establish the proposition, in some sense undeniable, that 'no idea can exist out of the mind.' It is impossible for us—for it involves a contradiction—even to imagine anything except sensations, perceptions, or emotions. We cannot even think of anything but 'ideas,' and ideas are dependent upon the mind. From this the natural inference is that, where there is no mind there is no idea—that is, nothing. 'Their *esse* is *percipi*,'[1] he says of 'unthinking things,' which are equivalent to ideas. They must, then, vanish with the percipient subject. This Berkeley admits, but he draws an inference unlike that which at first suggests itself. 'Sensible things,' he says, 'do really exist, and if they really exist, they are necessarily perceived by an infinite mind; therefore there is an infinite mind or God.'[2] This he calls 'a direct and immediate demonstration of God's existence—a short method of crushing scepticism.' He tells us again that we know 'by experience' that sensible things are independent of our minds. There must, then, be some mind wherein they exist, in the intervals of our perception, or after our annihilation.[3] This argument involves some obvious difficulties, and even seems to involve a downright fallacy. How can I know 'by experience' that things which, by their definition are dependent on my perception, exist when I don't perceive them? And how, if this be some way proved, does the continued existence of a thing not perceived by me prove its existence in another

[1] Works, vol. i. 157. [2] Ib. i. 304. [3] Ib. i. 325.

mind? If by perceiving a thing I meant that I perceived that somebody else perceived it, it would follow that my absence would leave it existing in his mind. But this is an impossible meaning, and Berkeley himself tells us [1] that we cannot directly perceive another consciousness. We only become aware of the existence of consciousness different from our own by an interpretation of external signs. Yet his argument seems to imply that a mind is necessary to the existence of an idea, not only, if we may say so, within, but without. We admit that there must be a mind impressed, but why should there be a mind impressing? Are we not confounding subject and object? or tacitly assuming an idea to be a kind of separable thing which may be taken out of one mind and preserved in another? Moreover, if we admit that some substratum is necessary to preserve the continuity of the external world, do we escape, by calling it 'mind,' from all the difficulties involved, according to Berkeley, in the conception of matter?

40. Berkeley has another answer, which, however, is not clearly distinguished by him from the foregoing. He tells us that 'all the things which we perceive are visibly inactive. There is nothing of power or agency included in them. So that one idea or object of thought cannot produce or make any alteration in another.' [2] The connections which we perceive between things are not causal, but symptomatic. The fire does not cause pain, but is the mark that warns me of pain.[3] Our knowledge, then, of sensible things can only be derived from experience. We learn by experience, as is shown in the 'New Theory of Vision,' to interpret visual ideas as significant of tactual ideas, and *vice versâ*. We cannot deduce one thing from another by any process of reason, for the connection is arbitrary and imposed by the will of the Creator. But—and this is his fundamental doctrine—there must be a cause which excites these separate and inactive atoms. The cause known as matter is exploded. The true cause must be spiritual and immaterial, or, in other words, God. It is God who speaks to us by the symbolism of ideas. 'Vision' (the thought is one of his fundamental conceptions) 'is the language of the author of nature.' [4]

[1] Works, vol. i. 326.
[2] Ib. i. 168.
[3] Ib. i. 190.
[4] Ib. i. 387.

But why is spirit—the only substance[1] according to Berkeley—a more satisfactory explanation than matter?

41. The answer is given most explicitly in a remarkable passage added in the third edition of the 'Dialogues.'[2] We know the existence of spirit, he says, though we cannot know the existence of matter. We have a 'notion' of spirit, though we cannot frame an 'idea' of it; and that notion does not, like the idea of matter, involve any contradiction. What, then, is the notion? Spirit, he says, is that 'active being, whose existence consists, not in being perceived, but in perceiving ideas and thinking,'[3] whereas ideas are inactive and perceived by the spirit. It follows that we can only conceive of cause or active power as inherent in a spiritual substance.[4] Now, I am conscious of producing certain ideas at will, and am equally conscious of being passive in regard to other ideas.[5] These other ideas must have some cause, and as I am not the cause, they must be caused by another spirit. An idea, which is in this sense independent of my mind, proves the existence of another mind, and the general order of the universe proves it to be the manifestation of one eternal, infinitely wise, and perfect Spirit.[6]

42. It is this line of thought, implicit rather than clearly elaborated, in the earlier treatises which led to the Platonism of 'Siris.' The philosophy of the later work remained in too nebulous a state to affect the general development of thought. But even in its earlier form, it becomes plain that Berkeley's philosophy is essentially dependent on his theory of causation. The one reality in the universe is mind or spirit; and mind reveals itself only as will or as the sole conceivable type of creative force. Spirit perceives and generates ideas, in themselves inactive. The one omnipresent Spirit is revealed in the persistence and harmony of the universe; finite and created spirits manifesting their own existence through their spontaneous activity, and recognising the existence of the Supreme Spirit by the sense of dependence. This is what remains when we have got rid of matter. There is one substance—spirit; and the soul of man is in presence of the Creator, who addresses it through the symbolism of ideas.

[1] Works, vol. i. 159.
[2] Ib. i. 327-9.
[3] Ib. i. 228.
[4] Ib. i. 310.
[5] Ib. i. 170.
[6] Ib. i. 232.

Without considering the logical coherence of this philosophy, we see that Berkeley, whose writings otherwise anticipate to a remarkable degree the teaching of Hume, escapes from scepticism by declaring the necessity of efficient causes. The union of nature depends upon this living bond. Destroy the conception of cause as a living force, and his philosophy crumbles to atoms. Nothing is left but a series of sensations, strictly made up of atomic units. Now it was precisely this conception which Hume assailed most pointedly, and his assault upon it was that part of his doctrine which most impressed his disciples and followers.

43. Hume, unlike Berkeley or Locke, was absolutely free from theological prepossessions. He, and he alone, amongst contemporary thinkers, followed logic wherever it led him. Hume, indeed, may be accused of some divergence from the straight path under the influence of literary vanity. To that cause we may partly attribute his singular attempt to extinguish his early and most complete work, the 'Treatise on Human Nature.' During his youth, however, he was a reasoner pure and simple, and the subsequent change in his literary activity probably implied some real dissatisfaction with part of the earlier treatise, whilst we shall see that, in another sense, it was a legitimate consequence of the principles to which he still undoubtedly adhered. Hume's scepticism completes the critical movement of Locke. It marks one of the great turning-points in the history of thought. From his writings we may date the definite abandonment of the philosophical conceptions of the preceding century, leading in some cases to an abandonment of the great questions as insoluble, and, in others, to an attempt to solve them by a new method. Hume did not destroy ontology or theology, but he destroyed the old ontology ; and all later thinkers who have not been content with the mere dead bones of extinct philosophy, have built up their systems upon entirely new lines.

44. Hume starts from the positions occupied by Locke and Berkeley. He regards innate ideas as exploded ; he takes Berkeley's view of abstraction and of the distinction between primary and secondary qualities ; he applies and carries out more systematically the arguments by which Berkeley had assailed the hypothetical substratum of material qualities.

But with Hume the three substances disappear together. The soul is dissolved by the analysis which has been fatal to its antithesis. All grounds for an *a priori* theology are cut away, though this conclusion is, for obvious reasons, not so unequivocally displayed in the treatise. All our knowledge is framed out of 'impressions' and 'ideas,' ideas being simply decaying impressions. The attempt to find a reality underlying these impressions is futile, and even self-contradictory. We are conscious only of an unceasing stream of more or less vivid feelings, generally cohering in certain groups. The belief that anything exists outside our mind, when not actually perceived, is a 'fiction.' The belief in a continuous subject which perceives the feelings is another fiction. The only foundation of the belief that former coherences will again cohere is custom. Belief is a 'lively idea related to or associated with a present impression.'[1] Reason is 'nothing but a wonderful and unintelligible instinct in our souls, which carries us along a certain train of ideas, and endows them with particular qualities according to their particular situations and relations.'[2] Association is in the mental what gravitation is in the natural world.[3] The name signifies the inexplicable tendency of previously connected ideas and impressions to connect themselves again. We can only explain mental processes of any kind by resolving them into such cases of association. Thus reality is to be found only in the ever-varying stream of feelings, bound together by custom, regarded by a 'fiction' or set of fictions as implying some permanent set of external or internal relations, and becoming beliefs only as they acquire liveliness. Chance, instead of order, must, it would seem, be the ultimate objective fact, as custom, instead of reason, is the ultimate subjective fact. We have reached, it is plain, the fullest expression of scepticism, and are not surprised when Hume admits that his doubts disappear when he leaves his study. The old bonds which held things together have been completely dissolved. Hume can see no way to replace them, and Hume, therefore, is a systematic sceptic.

[1] Works, vol. i. 396. Hume is not quite satisfied with this definition. See Appendix to 'Treatise.'

[2] Hume's Works, vol. i. 471.

[3] Ib. i. 321.

45. I must attempt, however, to define rather more closely the nature of this destructive conclusion. Hume assails the old theory of perception and the old theory of causation. What are the elements of which the universe is composed, and how are they woven into a continuous whole? 'I see the sun.' How does that statement differ from the statement, 'I have certain sensations of light and heat'? 'I believe that the sun will rise to-morrow.' What do I mean by belief, and what is my warrant for this particular belief? Hume's analysis of this last question involves the theory of causation, which is his most celebrated contribution to philosophy. It became the prominent thesis of the Essays, which gave Hume's later version of his philosophy; it suggested Kant's enquiry into the foundations of philosophy, and it was accepted with little alteration by the school which followed Hume's lead in England. It is, however, closely connected with his other theories. The question, Why do I conceive of the world as something different from a series of sensations? is bound up with the further enquiry, Why do I regard the world thus constituted as regulated by certain invariable relations? Whether reasonably or otherwise, we do in fact interpret the stream of feelings of which consciousness is composed as implying an organised system of real existences or potentialities of experience, underlying each other in infinite complexity. As a fact, we believe in a set of permanent relations independent of our individual consciousness. How, and in what sense, is this to be 'explained'?

46. Let us begin with the theory of perception. Every perception must depend upon the perceiving subject. My sight depends upon my eyes. If they were differently constituted, I should see differently. Therefore, it was argued by Locke, colour is a secondary quality. It depends upon the perceiver as well as upon the thing perceived. Therefore it cannot have that reality which is to be found in the transcendental world alone, where it is assumed we might see things unaffected by the character of our eyes. Hume, following Berkeley, has only to apply this method to the primary qualities. They, as much as the secondary qualities, are perceived through the senses, and are equally unreal, if the presence of a subjective factor implies unreality. The ideas of colour,

sounds, tastes, and smells, are inseparably connected with the ideas of extension or solidity. Each implies the other, and to remove one set of ideas is to remove the other.[1] If we take an object to pieces in our imagination, we find that, when we have removed all the qualities known to us by our senses, we have removed everything. The supposed 'abstract idea,' which remains behind, is, as Berkeley has shown, a mere empty word. A thing is the sum of its qualities; and what we call the abstract idea of a triangle is but the idea of a particular triangle regarded as representative of an indefinite multitude of other triangles.[2] Thus, whenever an idea is suggested as corresponding to some independent reality, Hume challenges it to give an account of itself. Can we trace its derivation to some previous impression? If we cannot, it is an empty word. If we can, it must share the unreality of the impression which it represents.[3]

47. How then do we come by the distinction between external and internal? If every object of thought is either a sensation or the representative of a sensation, an actual or a decaying impression, how can we even think of things as existing outside of us? 'It is impossible for us,' says Hume, 'so much as to conceive or form an idea of anything specifically different from ideas and impressions. Let us fix our attention out of ourselves as much as possible. Let us chase our imaginations to the heavens, or to the utmost limits of the universe; we never can really advance a step beyond ourselves, nor can conceive any kind of existence but those perceptions which have appeared in that narrow compass. This is the universe of the Imagination, nor have we any idea but what is there produced.'[4] So great is our weakness that Hume notices as anomalous the case in which we form an idea of a particular shade of blue, when we have only perceived contiguous shades.[5] The mind is supposed to have no faculty except that of reviewing past impressions, modified only by their gradual decay.

48. Yet it is a plain fact of consciousness that we think of a table or a house as somehow existing independently of our perception of it. The mind is conscious of a series of

[1] Hume, vol. i. 514.
[2] Ib. i. 330, *et seq.*
[3] Ib. i. 369.
[4] Ib. i. 371.
[5] Ib. i. 315.

sensations of colour, form, and so forth. Some of these recur frequently in the same relative positions, though interrupted by other terms of the series. Why does the mind, which can only, as Hume says, reproduce its impressions and ideas, and reproduce them as they occurred, identify the recurrent terms, and then suppose them to exist behind the interrupting terms? Why are not the group of sensations which we call table supposed to vanish when they are not felt like the group of sensations which we call toothache? 'As far as the senses are judges,' he says, 'all perceptions are the same in the manner of their existence.'[1] The so-called qualities of bodies are sensations; the pain caused by a blow, the colours of the striking body, its extension and solidity, are equally feelings in the mind. We have, it would seem, in each case, the same ground, or absence of ground, for inferring a corresponding external existence in one case as in the other. Both inferences are alike reasonable or unreasonable. As reason does not infer the external existence in the case of a pain, it should not do so in the case of colour; and we must therefore refer to the imagination as the source of our belief in external existence. Hume traces, in a very ingenious chapter,[2] the mode in which the coherence and consistency of certain groups of feelings make it easy for the imagination to regard the series of similar but intermittent sensations as continuous and identical. As the attempt to satisfy the demand of the imagination, which thus suggests an independent existence of our perceptions, and the refusal of the reason to recognise an unperceived perception as possible, philosophers have hit upon the expedient of attributing interruption to our perceptions and independent continuity to 'objects.' But as an object can only be a perception—for we can imagine nothing but our feelings—the contradiction is really concealed, not evaded.[3] Here, says Hume, is the sceptical doubt which can never be 'radically cured.' The subjective element implies unreality. All perceptions have a subjective element. Therefore, the supposed reality must be a 'fiction.'

49. The doubt, in fact, has not been radically cured. The struggle between realists and idealists continues, and every

[1] Hume, vol. i. 483.

[2] 'Treatise,' part iv. § 2; vol. i. 478, &c.

[3] Ib. i. 504–5.

philosopher has his own solution. All that can be here attempted is to indicate the direction impressed upon later speculations by the doubt thus formally articulated. We may, perhaps, admit that Hume's account of the process by which a belief in an external world is actually suggested is fairly accurate, or that it coincides, as far as the contemporary state of psychology would allow, with the explanations given by later thinkers of his school.[1] Further, the process described is not strictly reason. A simple inspection of a sensation will not reveal an external object to which it corresponds. Nor can we say that the object, in the sense of a continuous something as it exists out of relation to the mind, 'resembles' the sensation, for that would be to attempt the contradictory feat of contemplating an unrelated relation. Still further, we may admit that the philosophy attacked by Hume, and the popular conceptions upon which it was based, did involve an element of 'fiction.' The whole history of philosophical thought is but a history of attempts to separate the object and the subject, and each new attempt implies that the previous line of separation was erroneously drawn or partly 'fictitious.' Such a familiar fact again as the belief that an object felt in the dark is coloured as we see it in the light, illustrates the popular tendency described by Hume [2] to attribute an objective existence to our own sensations—in other words, to believe in a 'fiction.'

50. In what direction, then, are we to escape? Granting that Hume has exposed certain contradictions involved in contemporary philosophy and in all popular conceptions, are we to regard those contradictions as insoluble? The first remark will probably be that Hume's 'fiction' implies the existence of a condition which he tends to ignore. If we are unable accurately to draw the line between the objective and subjective, and even forced to admit that the attempt to separate the two elements in perceptions common to the race implies a contradictory attempt to get outside of our own

[1] Compare, for example, Hume's 'Treatise,' part. iv. § 2. with Mr. Herbert Spencer's 'Principles of Psychology,' part vii. ch. xvi. xvii. xviii. Mr. Spencer, of course, differs from Hume's conclusions, and enlarges greatly his account of the constructive process; but the germs of his doctrine are to be found in Hume.

[2] See Hume, vol. i. 486.

minds, we must still admit that the primitive elements of consciousness imply the necessity of recognising the distinction. They have, that is, an objective and subjective aspect, and the power of thus organising impressions implies the existence of an organised mind. Hume's analysis seems to recognise no difference between the mind of a man and a polyp, between the intellectual and the merely sensitive animal. The mind is a bare faculty for repeating impressions; the power of grouping and arranging them is regarded as somehow illegitimate. Agreeing that all materials of thought are derived from experience, we yet have to account for the form impressed upon them. The destruction of innate ideas seemed to him, as to the philosophers whom he assailed, almost to imply the annihilation even of mental faculties. He could not allow that the function depended upon the organ without seeming to admit that the organ either created materials for itself, or was supplied with them from some source independent of experience. And, in the next place, the doctrine that belief in the external world is a 'fiction' is apparently self-destructive. If all reason is fiction, fiction is reason. It is indeed true that the process by which the belief is generated is not what we call reason. It does not imply a reference to general rules; but that is because it generates the rules. Feeling precedes reason, and is the material out of which reason is evolved. We become reasonable as we become conscious of the law by which our feelings have been unconsciously determined. Slowly and tentatively we arrive at a true conception of the division between the external and internal world by a series of approximate assumptions, each involving a slowly diminishing amount of error, and our belief is justified in proportion as the assumption thus blindly felt out gives coherent and accurate results. Hume follows the ontologists in trying to find a reason for reason, and to get the why of the wherefore. When he comes upon a process which underlies reason, instead of being deduced from it, he pronounces it to be fictitious as they call it transcendental. Thus we should say that, whilst Hume was right in limiting the mind to experience, and in declaring the existing distinction of object and subject to involve an error, he was

wrong in not observing that the very possibility of making the distinction implied an operative mind, and in not seeing that the process by which the distinction works itself into correspondence with facts is legitimate, though not, in his sense, reasoning. He cannot account for the existence of the organising power, and he does not understand the process by which the facts are finally organised.

51. Hume's attack on the theory of causation follows the same lines. We have nothing to deal with but a series of impressions and ideas. The hypothetical objects to which the ideas were taken to correspond have vanished, and the powers inherent in them must vanish equally. The idea of 'power' cannot be traced to any impression, and is therefore, by Hume's ordinary test, no idea at all, but an empty word. We say, for example, that fire burns. That, on the old interpretation, was explained to mean that fire had a latent power, which started into activity under certain conditions. But what is this power? We have an 'idea' of fire, because we once had an 'impression' of fire. The mental picture is a copy of a previous sensation. Similarly we have an idea of 'burning'—of a piece of paper, for example, turning black and crumpling up when exposed to fire. But of the power as an independent entity, existing independently of the two phenomena, we have no idea at all, for we can never have had an impression. Or contemplate the same facts from the subjective side. One thing, it had been held, was the cause of another when the existence of the second followed from the definition of the first. If we could define fire adequately —that is, if the definition expressed its essence—we could deduce the proposition 'fire burns,' as we deduce from the definition of a circle the proposition expressive of its various properties. Now, in this sense, as Hume argues, we can never know a cause. The various combinations of colour, form, and so on, might, for anything that we can tell, be replaced by any other combinations. We can separate in imagination any two ideas which have been combined; for what is distinguishable is separable.[1] We can think of fire without thinking of it as burning, of a planet without regarding it as gravitating; and similarly in all other cases. But, if

[1] See Hume, vol. i. 319, 326.

the existence of one thing logically implied the existence of another thing, such a separation would imply a contradiction. Erroneous logic may always be forced to yield such a contradiction by accurate analysis. In other words, the relation of cause and effect can never correspond to an *a priori* logical nexus; for it can never imply a contradiction in terms to suppose one body annihilated whilst others remain unaltered. But if logic implied any necessary connections between ideas, a contradiction must emerge in such cases. Hence the objective and the subjective links disappear together, and we are forced to admit that 'the uniting principle amongst our internal perceptions is as unintelligible as that among external objects, and it is not known to us in any other way than by experience.'[1]

52. The nature of this celebrated argument, and its affiliation to previous theories, may perhaps be more closely exhibited by an illustration given by Reid.[2] A magnet attracts iron. In the earlier stages of thought this phenomenon, if observed, might have been explained by the assumption that the magnet had an appetite for iron like that of a human being for food. As the points of unlikeness became evident, this appetite would gradually fade away into an occult power inherent in the magnet, and called forth on the approach of iron. The magnet, regarded as the active factor, was the cause; the movement produced in the iron would be the effect. Philosophers supposed that, from a complete definition of the magnet, this iron-attracting power might be deduced as a necessary consequence of the definition. Hume then argues that we can form no idea whatever of this supposed power, regarded as an independent entity. He observed, moreover, that our knowledge of its existence is nothing else than a knowledge that, as a matter of fact, magnets have been observed in previous cases to attract iron. Further, it is impossible to show by an *a priori* process that magnets must attract iron; were that possible, it would be impossible to conceive of a magnet as not attracting iron; whereas nothing is easier than to imagine the magnet and the iron co-existing without attraction. All that is left, therefore, is, on the one

[1] Hume, i. 463.

[2] Reid's Works, p. 113.

hand, the fact that magnets have attracted iron, and, on the other, the 'custom' set up in the mind of expecting a similar combination in future. Experience is all, and experience can never give rise to any logical inference beyond itself. All such inferences then are illogical or customary.

53. If now we examine the case more closely, we may see that Hume has made an omission similar to the omission already noticed in his theory of perception. He is perfectly right in asserting that our knowledge of this property of magnets depends upon experience alone. He is right, again, in a certain sense, in saying that we may conceive of a magnet not attracting iron. We have, that is, no *a priori* ground for the assertion that all the other qualities discovered in the magnet—its weight, colour, chemical composition, and so forth—may not be hereafter discovered in a body which does not attract iron. But he implicitly makes another assertion, easily confounded with this last, and yet involving a fundamental error—the assertion, namely, that we might expect to find a magnet identical in all respects with the first magnet which yet would not attract iron. This statement implies the existence of chance as something more than a name for our ignorance, and must therefore be denied by all who (on whatever grounds) believe in the validity of reason, or the correlative doctrine of the regularity of the external world. Suppose, in fact, that we found that a so-called magnet did not attract iron, we should be entitled to conclude peremptorily that it was wanting in some quality, discoverable or not, which exists in true magnets. Its molecular composition, or the state of its molecules, must be in some way altered. We cannot hold that the magnet loses one quality whilst all the others are unchanged, though it may be that all the discovered, or even all the discoverable, qualities remain unchanged. In the last case, there is an element of chance in the sense, that is, that undiscoverable conditions are present; but there cannot be in the sense that the same conditions exist and produce different results. Metaphysicians may still dispute what is our warrant for this assumption, but its validity is implied in all reasonings about the external world; for otherwise the world is not a system of permanent relations. Hume has here again come upon an ultimate process implied in all rea-

son, and not being able to find a further justification for it, pronounces it to be a mere 'custom.'

54. The point may be stated in a slightly different form. Every phenomenon is known as the sum of a set of relations. The total phenomenon—the attraction of the iron by the magnet—is the effect. The separate factors, the presence of the iron and the magnet, each of which are decomposable into various groups of relations to the perceiving subject, and to each other, are the causes. The same phenomenon can always be resolved into the same causes. If the phenomenon differs, some one or more of the components must differ. In this sense the assertion of the uniformity of causation is resolvable into something like an identical truth, or at least a statement of the postulate implied in all reason, and which constitutes the very reasoning process, that we can make identical propositions in identical cases. We thus come upon the fundamental illusion which underlies Hume's scepticism, and which was inherited by him from preceding thinkers. We fancy that we can separate the two terms of a relation without altering them. We take the magnet which is not magnetic, the fire which does not burn, the planet which does not gravitate, and suppose that the idea remains unaltered even in the act of altering it. Hence we come to the contradictory conceptions of unperceivable perceptions and inactive activities. The magnet has no power of attracting independently of the iron. The two are equally essential factors in the phenomenon ; and when we separate them, and then try to mend the conception by the fiction of an occult power, we are led to scepticism by discarding one factor whilst continuing to regard the other of the connected objects as still entitled to the name of cause. The true answer to Hume's scepticism is, therefore, that we cannot conceive of a non-magnetic magnet ; for that is to conceive of a magnet deprived of the quality which makes it a magnet. But it remains true, as Hume says, that this quality is revealed to us by experience alone, and that we have no right in any given case to appeal to an *a priori* reason. What remains after Hume's scepticism has been allowed full play is the objective fact of the regularity of the external world, and the subjective faculty which corresponds to it, in virtue of which we assert, not that this or

that truth, revealed by experience, is universally true, but that every experience implicitly contains a universal truth. When two experiences differ, we are entitled, that is, to assume that there is some difference in the conditions which may or may not be evident to our senses. To make this assumption is to reason. Hume's scepticism is justified in so far as it denies the existence in the mind of a certain list of self-evidencing truths independent of all experience. It is erroneous in confounding this denial with the suicidal denial that the mind possesses, or rather is constituted by a certain faculty involved in the recombination of experience. Having emptied the mind of its supposed innate ideas and *a priori* truths, he fancies that the mind itself is dissolved, and that reason is shown to be 'custom.' The organism remains, though the laws of its operation are only revealed to us by the experience upon which it operates.

55. The critical movement, then, of which Hume gave the last word amounted to the final destruction of the old assumptions by which philosophers, developing and modifying the earliest modes of conception, had reconciled the doctrines of the regularity of the universe and the validity of reason with the observation that all phenomena are incessantly changing, and that knowledge of the visible universe can only be derived from the impressions made by these changing phenomena on the senses. The assumptions, themselves the phantoms of earlier assumptions, are shown to involve irreconcilable contradictions. The sceptic pulls the constructions of the dogmatist to pieces, and assumes that no dogmas can be discovered. From the dogmatist he adopts the introspective method, or, in other words, assumes that the ultimate truths, if such truths exist, may be found by simply inspecting our own minds. Now, such inspection cannot reveal the observing faculty itself, but only the varying set of experiences which it has observed. Hence, truth can only be discovered if the mind is stocked with certain ideas miraculously inserted prior to all experience. But the sceptic proves against the dogmatist that no such idea is discoverable. Every idea that can be assigned is traceable to certain observations, which must be affected by the mind of the observer, or have a 'subjective' element. But the sceptic assumes, again,

with the dogmatist, that the subjective element implies unreality. Hence there is no truth discoverable. This mode of analysis applied to the three great ideas shows them to be unreal. The bond which holds the external universe together is non-existent or essentially undiscoverable. The bond which holds together the corresponding mental construction must be equally undiscoverable, for the innate ideas and principles upon which it must be founded have failed to stand the accepted test. Briefly, the method by which alone, as dogmatists and sceptics agreed, truth could be discoverable, led to the hopeless attempt of getting out of ourselves and seeing things as we do not see them. Scepticism, therefore, was inevitable, unless a different method could be suggested. It had shown beyond all dispute that the old conceptions involved an element of fiction, and, in fact, they were thenceforward exorcised from living philosophy. Ontology revived, but it revived by striking out a new path. The conceptions of God, the soul, and matter were not destroyed, but they were transformed.

56. The line of escape from these difficulties was indicated by Kant's theory of time and space. The mind is conceived as a mould which imposes its own form upon the experience which it received. In every act of perception there are two factors, the objective and subjective, neither of which can be conceived apart from the other. Reality does not imply the absence of a subjective organ, but only that the organ is operating according to universal laws. It is not necessary for the discovery of truth to know things as they cannot be known, or to discover propositions existing independently of a relation between the perceiving and the perceived. The two terms of relation, which had been arbitrarily separated, are again brought together, and the hopeless attempt to get outside ourselves is abandoned. It is fortunately needless, however, to touch upon the many problems suggested by this conception, even in the briefest terms. Kant's philosophy did not react upon English thought till a period later than that with which I am dealing. If Kant had never lived, or had lived in Pekin, English thinkers in the eighteenth century would not have been less conscious of his position. It is enough to mention the difficulty which

would have made his view unacceptable to such a mind as Hume's, even if it had been presented to him. The theory of a mind imposing its own forms upon experience seems to introduce an *a priori* element. If that element can in any way be separated in thought from its correlative, there still seems to be a road to the otherwise hopeless attempt of constructing a philosophy independent of experience; and the experiment was made by some of Kant's German successors. To admit the existence of an *a priori* factor in thought might be as dangerous as to admit the existence of *a priori* truths in the soul. Locke's attempt to expel the unknowable, and the scholasticism founded upon it, might be evaded by a more refined procedure. Modern thinkers of Hume's school meet the difficulty by distinguishing between the *a priori* element in the individual mind and in the mind of the race. Each man brings with him certain inherited faculties, if not inherited knowledge; but the faculties have been themselves built up out of the experience of the race. Such a conception, however, was beyond Hume's sphere of thought, and obviously could not be attained so long as it was held to be possible to account for knowledge by simple introspection or the examination of the individual mind. Experience must be understood in a far wider sense than that in which Hume could possibly understand it, before it could explain the elementary phenomena of thought. Thus we may say that his scepticism expresses the natural result of trying to explain thought exclusively by individual experience, and declaring the unexplained residuum to be mere 'fiction' or custom, as the dogmatic theory is the result of the same attempt when the unexplained residuum is assumed to imply innate ideas. It is in this sense a crude attempt to apply a sound criterion, but a criterion which is only sound when applied with a sufficient appreciation of its meaning.

57. Here, then, we have the last word of the English criticism. What would be the natural working of Hume's scepticism, so far as it was accepted by his contemporaries? Absolute scepticism, it may be said, is an unthinkable state of mind. So far as Hume's reasoning tended to show that all reasoning was absurd, it was self-contradictory and inoperative. He admits the fact himself in the concluding

section of the fourth part of his treatise, where he says that his doubts vanish as soon as he leaves his study for the streets. The most unflinching sceptic, of course, believes in the objections to knocking his head against a post as implicitly as the most audacious dogmatist. To say that belief as belief is absurd is not only practically, but theoretically, puerile. Belief is only a custom, therefore it is unreasonable to believe. But if reason is only customary, this can only mean that it is not customary to believe. Lower the intensity of all belief, and you do nothing; for custom being everything, the custom which preponderates in one direction will be just as effective as the reason which you have abolished. And, in fact, though Hume affects to attack equally all reasoning which has to do with the external world, his scepticism is really directed against the superfluous hypothesis of an absolute substratum distinct from the world. The custom which induces us to act upon evidence is still left for guidance in practical affairs; the supposed entities which lie behind the phenomena are shown, so far as his logic is valid, to be superfluous or meaningless.

58. Thus the moral which Hume naturally drew from his philosophy was the necessity of turning entirely to experience. Experience, and experience alone, could decide questions of morality or politics; and Hume put his theory in practice when he abandoned speculation to turn himself to history. Whether because they shared Hume's doubts, or because, without much speculation, they recognised the failure of previous philosophers to reach any fruitful conclusions, and saw no more promising road to success, Hume's ablest contemporaries followed his example. The last half of the eighteenth century, as we shall hereafter see more fully, is specially characterised by its tendency to historical enquiry. But it must further be remarked that historical enquiry thus divorced from philosophy leads in the first instance only to crude results. The histories of Hume, Robertson, and Gibbon, the great triumvirate of the day, have a common weakness, though Gibbon's profound knowledge has enabled his great work to survive the more flimsy productions of his colleagues. The fault, briefly stated, seems to be an incapacity to recognise the great forces by which history is moulded, and

the continuity which gives to it a real unity. We have but a superficial view; a superficiality, in the cases of Hume and Robertson, implying inadequate research; and both in their case and Gibbon's implying a complete acquiescence in the external aspects of events, and the accidental links of connection, without any attempt to penetrate to the underlying and ultimately determining conditions. The defect was inevitable from the point of view of Hume's philosophy, or in the absence of all philosophy. The formula that 'anything may be the cause of anything else' must obviously lead to a perfunctory discharge of the duties of a philosophical historian. Any superficial combination may be expected to produce results entirely incommensurate with its apparent importance. The slightest accident may change, not only a dynasty or a form of government, but the whole social constitution or the beliefs of the human race. The first crude interrogation of experience reveals to us only varieties of external conformation, without exhibiting the governing forces which mould the internal constitution. Hume's philosophy, in fact, when applied to the examination of history, falls in with a crude empiricism instead of an experiential philosophy. The world is a chaos, not an organised whole; and we are content with detecting random resemblances and contrasts here and there without resolving them into more simple and general uniformities. A form of government, for example, is characteristically regarded as possessing an independent virtue, without regard to the conditions of the time or the race. We look at the outward conformation of the mass without asking what are the molecular forces which bind it together. To apply the inductive method effectually, it is necessary that the data given by experience should be properly sorted and arranged. Our mere collection of curiosities must be formed into an organised museum. Hume's cruder method tempted the historian to overlook this necessary process. It must, indeed, be added that the general desire to appeal to experience was an essential step towards something better. This kind of historical empiricism was gradually to lead to a genuine historical method. We may see the germs of a more fruitful investigation of some important problems in such books as Horne Tooke's 'Diversions of Purley,' which is a premature attempt

to apply philological enquiries to the history of thought; or, in Sir W. Jones's studies of Oriental literature, which helped to found the science of comparative mythology, and in various attempts, some of which will hereafter be noticed, to apply a truly historical method to various theological and political problems. Still, the narrowness and comparative fruitlessness of the English movement, when set beside contemporary German thought, is generally and perhaps rightly brought to show that even an unsatisfactory philosophy may be better than no philosophy at all. In the last half of the century, that which is permanently valuable may be regarded as a feeling after the historical method; and really great results were obtained in one direction by Adam Smith, and in another by the admirable genius of Burke.

## IV. COMMON SENSE AND MATERIALISM.

59. A kind of implicit consciousness of the difficulties signalised by Hume is shown in the aversion with which many forcible thinkers of the time regarded all philosophical speculation. Johnson, for example, represents the most thoroughly national frame of mind. Johnson's love of truth in the ordinary affairs of life was combined with an indifference, or, we may almost say, an aversion, to speculative truth. If you once ask the ultimate question, he seems to have thought, you will get no conclusive answer, and be left without a compass in the actual conduct of life. Burke's dislike to 'metaphysics' was partly owing to the same conviction. But men cannot be altogether restrained from asking awkward questions, nor is permanent doubt a possible state of mind for any but a few men of rare intellectual temperament. Some sort of provisional refuge, at least, had to be found for men thoughtful enough to demand a philosophical system, when the old theories had been so rudely handled. The general nature of this permanent resting-place must be briefly indicated. The weakness of Hume's scepticism may be exhibited, as we have seen, by saying that his method confined him to the examination of the individual mind. The single method of discovering truth was to examine the furniture supposed

to be stored in that receptacle. If none of it could be shown to have a transcendental origin, there was no means of discovering ultimate truth. But it was equally clear that some things remained inexplicable, or at least unexplained, by this process. This explanation, so far as an explanation is possible, can only be reached, it would now be replied, when we introduce the social element. The faculties of the individual have been built up by the past experiences of the race. The primary distinction between object and subject is only intelligible as distinguishing between the perceptions peculiar to the individual and those common to the race. That is real which would be seen by anyone else in my position. Language itself, in which all our thoughts are registered, has been produced by the co-operation of countless generations, and bears marks of its origin. We cannot describe a simple sensation without introducing the intellectual process by which it has already been classified. And thus, in the attempt to analyse knowledge, Hume is constantly forced by the mere fact that he has to use words to assume, in appearance at least, the very mental processes which he is seeking to explain. Thus thinkers who were unable to point to the precise source of the sceptical fallacy were yet impressed with a strong feeling of the inadequacy of his analysis. Here was clearly something unexplained. There was an *a priori* element in the knowledge of the individual, though the old methods of representing it had been shown to be fallacious. In some sense or other, belief in an external world must be more than a mere 'fiction,' and reason more than a 'custom.' The answer suggested by Kant remained inaccessible; and it would be easy to suggest reasons, derived from the national character or social conditions, to account for this inaccessibility. But reasons which profess to explain such individual phenomena are not often satisfactory. We are not sufficiently acquainted with the laws which regulate the appearance of unique genius to say why Kant should not have been an Englishman.

60. It would be easier to say why the speculation of Kant's successors and Kant's scholastic mode of exposition were uncongenial to Englishmen. Our English sobriety and unwillingness, if I may use the phrase, to make fools of ourselves,

has checked our philosophical ambition. We have, it may be, too much sense of humour not to be even pusillanimously afraid of the ridicule which awaits the daring adventurer when he falls back to earth from attempts to soar above the atmosphere. One consequence is that, in England, attempts at *a priori* philosophy have taken the form of an appeal to common sense. We cannot be exposed to ridicule when we are ostensibly endeavouring to confirm everybody's opinion. A thoroughgoing scepticism is from this point of view more absurd than the most daring dogmatism. The sceptic who could be rightfully challenged to run his head against a post, must be, it seemed, a greater fool than the philosopher who lost his head in the clouds. This thoroughly English conviction, which thus tries to convert the *vox populi* into the *vox Dei*, seems to have been first made popular in the eighteenth century by Shaftesbury.[1] We shall hereafter have to consider his application of the principle to ethical problems. Certainly there is no sphere of thought more carefully to be guarded from the attacks of the sceptic, or the treacherous support of the dogmatist, than the sphere of human conduct. Moral truths must be preserved at all hazards from the sceptical assault. Shaftesbury's influence was direct and important in this department of thought. Hutcheson transplanted his doctrine to Scotland ; and Reid, though far from sharing in Hutcheson's ethical views, takes a somewhat analogous position in philosophy.

61. The genesis of his own theories is clear and independent. At one time, he tells us,[2] he had been a disciple of Berkeley's. He was alarmed, however, by the logical consequences which followed when Berkeley's method was systematically carried out by Hume. Startled, like Kant, by the threatened dissolution of every guarantee for truth and order, he attempted, like Kant, to find some mode of escape. Unluckily, his intellect was not so keen, and his love of speculative truth not so unmixed. Kant, we may suppose, was more startled by Hume's apparent destruction of all basis for philosophical certainty ; Reid, by the remoter consequences

[1] See Reid's reference to Shaftesbury, Works, p. 423, 'On the Intellectual Powers,' essay vi.

[2] Ib. 283.

to morality and theology. Reid is, at any rate, content with an apparent solution of the logical problem which was totally insufficient as a stimulant to new enquiry. His purpose, as he frequently asserts, is the justification of the ordinary beliefs of mankind. Ordinary men believe in the reality of the external world, and sceptics had tried to show that this external world was a fiction. Where was the gap in their arguments? Hume follows from Berkeley, Berkeley from Locke, Locke from Descartes.[1] The error must be sought for, then, in the very primary assumption of the system. This assumption, said Reid, is that which is embodied in the Cartesian doctrine of ideas. Philosophers had assumed that we could not know the ultimate reality, except through the 'ideas,' which are the immediate objects of thought. This was the initial fallacy—the fatal error, which vitiated the whole subsequent system—and we must meet it by asserting that we are directly conscious of ultimate realities. Assertion, however, is not proof; and it was, therefore, incumbent upon Reid to confirm his assertion by showing how, or in what sense, our perceptions reveal the realities. He has already pronounced Hume's attack upon the Cartesian theory to be conclusive, and that, of all possible theories, is the one which he is bound to avoid. Now, it is anything but easy to say what Reid's theory may have been, and the difficulty is rather increased than diminished by the efforts of his most learned and accomplished editor, Sir W. Hamilton. Hamilton, however, states, in one place, that it was almost identical, if not with the theory of Descartes himself, at least with the theory of some of Descartes' interpreters.[2] Any attempt at an articulate statement brings out the fundamental resemblance, though the argument requires a little modification. In other words, Reid executes a directly retrograde movement, and that, after repeatedly asserting that the position to which he has returned was untenable.

62. The statement is by itself sufficient to explain the fundamental weakness of Reid's philosophy. If, in fact, he attempted to advance a step beyond the simple assertion that common sense was right, he must inevitably have followed the

[1] See, for example, an explicit statement to this effect, p. 103; 'Enquiry,' ch. i. § 7, 132; ib. ch. v. § 8, 275; 'Intellectual Powers,' essay ii. ch. viii.

[2] Ib. p. 257, note.

old Cartesian line of thought, known by painful experience to lead to no fruitful results, and admitted by himself to be based upon a fallacy. No position could be more hopeless, though it had a certain superficial appearance of being reasonable. To a hasty observer, it might resemble the process of taking what was sound, and refusing what was extravagant. The process is less promising when we see that it is equivalent to assuming some plausible first principles, and denying that anything can be learnt from them. We can only regard Reid's philosophy as a provisional structure, possibly justifiable under the circumstances. Since the attempt to advance beyond our premisses can only lead us into hopeless scepticism, we may as well stay where we are. If our principles cannot be justified, we had better take them for granted. Indeed, Reid persuaded himself that this is a legitimate process by a theory which had already been turned to account by Descartes. Whenever he comes to a principle which cannot be proved, he says that it is implanted in our hearts by the Almighty. When Reid finds an inexplicable belief, he calls it a divine instinct, where Hume would say that it was a fiction. We are unable to explain our knowledge of objects independent of ourselves, or to see the links which connect them. To admit that our knowledge is on that account precarious, would be to fall into scepticism. We must therefore call it divine.[1] As with Hume we can only observe the sequence of phenomena, but we assume that a divine power causes the sequence to be invariable.[2] We believe in the existence of an external world, in which the primitive qualities are embodied. Berkeley denies that the vulgar really hold the metaphysical doctrine which is attributed to them, or that we have any conception whatever of the imaginary substratum which is left when all sensible qualities have been extracted. Reid can only reply dogmatically that we do believe. Hume says that the supposed substance is a fiction. God, replies Reid, would not force us to believe in a fiction, although Reid is in the same breath explaining the origin of many illusions forced upon us by

[1] See *e.g.*, p. 130, Reid's 'Enquiry,' ch. v. § 7 ; p. 159, ch. vi. § 12 ; p. 187, ch. vi. § 21.

[2] Ib. p. 260 ; 'Intellectual Powers,' ch. vi.

Nature. But why, Hume might ask, do you believe in God? I believe, Reid would apparently reply, from the marks of design in the universe. Hume, again, argues at great length that the argument from design is fallacious. To this Reid answers that the belief that an intelligible order implies a designer is one of the first principles of our nature.[1] What more can be said, or why should not Reid say at once with old Johnson, 'We know that we are free,' or that we perceive external realities, and 'there's an end on't.'

63. The only value, then, of such a philosophy must be sought in a different direction. Reid might fairly say that Hume's analysis of thought and of the various emotional and intellectual faculties of the mind was insufficient. Something must be wanting, though he could not precisely say what; and meanwhile he might be justified in pronouncing various mental phenomena to be unexplained, though he might be wrong in declaring that they were ultimately inexplicable. The facility with which Reid and other philosophers of the Scotch school invent as many first principles as they find convenient was highly unphilosophical—especially in the sense in which philosophy is understood to involve an explanation of everything. But if an ultimate principle be taken to mean a principle not yet analysed, the writers who maintain the existence of such principles do good service, if only by stimulating the ingenuity of new opponents. They may be a useful counterpoise to the facility with which others deny the existence of sentiments or beliefs which will not fit into their system. And thus, though Reid's influence tended for the time to turn men's minds away from ultimate philosophical problems, their discussions tended to call attention to many psychological questions. This or that, they said too easily, is a primitive faculty of the mind; but in trying to discover which were and which were not primitive faculties, they excited a great deal of ingenious, and not altogether fruitless, investigation. We are surprised to find a short philosophical treatise intended to answer Hume's attacks upon all that passed for fundamental truth, culminate in a discussion of squinting and the laws of vision. But we may admit that an enquiry into squinting might reveal some unsuspected physiological truths. In

[1] Reid's Works, 457–9; 'Intellectual Powers,' essay vi. ch. vi.

this direction the influence of Reid fell in with that of another and chiefly antagonistic school, which arose after the publication of Hume's sceptical conclusions.

64. The excellent and acute Hartley published, in 1749, a treatise 'On Man,' destined to exercise a considerable influence upon English speculation. Priestley and Abraham Tucker, in the next generation, were his disciples. Coleridge was greatly impressed by him in early life, and James Mill, by working out his theories in more detail, and with greater logical rigour, transmitted his influence to the most recent school of English psychologists. Hartley and Priestley represent a curious combination of opinion; they are theological materialists; and though Priestley became a Unitarian, both writers are vigorous believers in a miraculous revelation. I need not enquire how far it is possible to combine materialism and theism without an absolute logical contradiction. Historically speaking, the two doctrines are naturally opposed. Materialism and Atheism are the final expression of a reaction against the attempt to frame a philosophy by rising into a supernatural world. The metaphysical doctrine assailed by Hume tended, when carried to its logical extreme, to identify reality with reason. The universe, it would seem, is nothing but a series of abstract truths, related to each other as the propositions of Euclid are related to the primary geometrical axioms, and substantialised by their reference to God or pure Being. The existence of this sensible world of concrete facts seems to be contradictory, because apparently arbitrary or contingent. Time and space are illusions produced somehow by our inadequate perceptions. It seemed to be impossible to effect a transition from the world of absolute truth to the world of appearances revealed to us by our senses. From the opposite point of view, the whole system appeared to be a mass of futile logomachy; a manufacture of cobwebs of the brain; a transformation, by cunning tricks of dialectic, of identical, and therefore futile, propositions into the delusive likeness of fruitful propositions. When Hume's scepticism had thrown doubts upon the fundamental assumptions of the ontologists, the materialists proposed to escape to the world of tangible, visible, sense-giving realities. There at least was sound footing, in spite of all metaphysical subtleties. The phy-

sical sciences had revealed many new and solid truths, however humble their pretensions. Make philosophy one of the physical sciences, and similar results might be anticipated. If the ontologists took leave of the solid groundwork of experience, the tendency of the materialists was to get rid of reason. Not only innate ideas, but innate faculties, seemed to disappear. The reasoning process itself becomes nothing but a particular case of the mechanical action and reaction of material particles; and so far from the order of the universe being deducible from some primitive and necessary truths, the ultimate basis even of order must be chance, in the sense at least of essentially unknowable processes.

65. So far, then, as theology was founded upon the old ontology, it necessarily disappeared from the consistent materialism of the French school. Sensations took the place of innate ideas, as the sole ultimate substance of the fabric of our knowledge. The English thinkers here, as in so many other cases, were less thoroughgoing. Hartley and Priestley were theologians, though their theology was connected by the flimsiest of ties with their philosophy. They chose to retain the old arguments, but their choice was dictated by their prejudices instead of their reason. The theology is an addition to their creed, not a natural development; and when it entirely dropped out from the later exposition of James Mill, the system only became more coherent than before. So far, then, it is plain that no new standing-point could be afforded for a theory of the universe. The old ideas were simply retained in their old shape, and retained at the price of an unnatural alliance.

66. Nor, again, could the escape from mere scepticism by the dogmatism of genuine materialists be open to them. The vital objection to materialism, considered as a statement of ultimate truth, is that the elements into which it resolves the world are themselves only known by a complex intellectual operation. We can only speak or think of atoms and forces in terms of time and space which already imply, and therefore cannot explain, certain mental conceptions. The materialist might conceivably discover the ultimate laws of all organic or inorganic matter as seen from outside, but could still not account for the mind which sees from the inside.

The ultimate conceivable end is indicated by a phrase of Priestley's. 'It is not impossible,' he says, 'but that in time we may see how it is that sensation results from organisation.'[1] We might, that is, see the modifications of the nerves produced by external conditions, and trace the consequent modifications transmitted to the brain. We should thus detect the laws of the human organism as a visible and tangible object, and construct a theory of the physical correlates of the intellectual processes. We might ultimately frame a complete system of the sensible world, or of the objective order of phenomena; and some knowledge of things as thus revealed to us may be a useful or an essential step towards obtaining a complete philosophy. But, to say nothing of the necessity of fusing such a doctrine with the doctrine obtainable from the inverse point of view, it is plain that Hartley and Priestley could not get beyond the very first step. Their method, if properly carried out, would involve a complete study of the organisation and functions of the brain and nervous system; but, in the contemporary state of physiological knowledge, the very outlines of such a theory were not even dimly perceptible. Hartley's crude hypothesis of 'vibratiuncles' was little more than verbal, and was already thrown over by Priestley himself. But when the vibratiuncles were abandoned, nothing remained beyond the bare statement that some indefinable processes of a mechanical nature determined the intellectual results, or in some sense were themselves the results.

67. The final value of Hartley's system was, therefore, the impulse given to the attempt to resolve complex into simple intellectual operations by the help of the laws of association. The weakness manifest in Hartley's original treatise was still perceptible in most of his followers. His ultimate test of truth, for example, is curiously unsatisfactory. Truth implies a correspondence between objective and subjective. If we put aside the subjective point of view entirely, the word seems scarcely to have a meaning. How can a set of vibrations set up in the brain have any likeness to the external forces in which they originated? Or how, again, can a general proposition be obtained? Since the beliefs in any individual mind

[1] 'Disquisitions on Matter and Spirit,' p. 153.

are built up out of countless multitudes of experiences, which may vary indefinitely, the resulting product may also, it would seem, vary without limit; and as the external universe is made of chance, so the internal atoms may be arranged in any possible configuration. An answer may, perhaps, be given to such difficulties; but from Hartley's point of view the answer is not perceptible, nor is even the need of an answer clearly present to his mind. No one, indeed, who believes that all knowledge must be constructed from experience will doubt that Hartley did a most important service by bringing into prominence a mode of analysis, already suggested, it is true, by Locke, Hume, and Hobbes, to say nothing of earlier writers, but capable of a far wider application than had ever occurred to them. We shall hereafter have to remark its application to ethical questions; but here it is sufficient to observe that, whatever may have been the fruitfulness of the germ of thought cast into speculation by Hartley, it neither did, nor could, in the hands of its originator, suggest any systematic philosophy, nor even a sound basis for a philosophy. Hartley led the way to reducing many difficult problems, which, as it had seemed, could only be solved by introducing supernatural or transcendental factors to simpler terms; but, instead of asking the ultimate questions, he calmly filled the void in his system by appropriating an uncongenial system; and was hardly alive, therefore, to the tendency of his own method.

68. A brief reference must suffice to one other thinker of considerable ability, who, in attempting to assail the dominant philosophy, produced at least a literary curiosity. Lord Monboddo, following James Harris, the author of 'Hermes,' attempted to revive the Aristotelian philosophy. His six quartos upon 'Antient Metaphysics,' and his six octavos upon the progress of language, contain much acute thought amidst huge masses of digression, repetition, and apology for eccentric crotchets. His main point is really a criticism of Locke and Hume for their confusion of sensation and perception. He makes many of the criticisms which from this point of view would commend themselves to the metaphysical school of which he professes himself an adherent; but he produced no influence upon thought—partly because his doc-

trine was an attempt to resuscitate the dead; and even more, perhaps, because it was overlaid with oddities, some of which are remembered when his more serious remarks are forgotten. He attacks Newton because, as he thinks, Newton implicitly denied the great principle of the inertness of matter,[1] and, therefore, upsets an argument, accepted by Monboddo from Andrew Baxter, for the existence of the soul. He believes in the *anima mundi*, in the existence of the vegetable, animal, and intellectual souls, and in other ancient dogmas. He proves the doctrine of the Trinity by the help of Plato and Aristotle; he argues for the physical degeneracy of the race, and proposes various quaint remedies derived from ancient sanitary practices. He tries to show that all the higher knowledge originated in Egypt; and, most of all, he believes in the humanity of the Ouran-Outang — that interesting animal being, in his eyes, the representative of man in a state of nature when he possessed an intellect in capacity, but not in energy or actuality. His object is apparently to put the natural man as low as possible, in order to show that all the qualities by which man differs from brutes imply the exertion of intellect. Language, for example, was 'invented' according to him, though the art was so difficult as to require the supernatural assistance of certain 'demon kings' of the early Egyptians. But it is unnecessary here to examine further into the queer speculations of this very ingenious manufacturer of intellectual curiosities. Reid and Hartley each founded a school; but Monboddo remained an isolated being, anointing himself according to the fashion of the ancients, growling at the degeneracy of mankind, and regarded by them as a semi-lunatic, outside the sphere of practical influence.

69. This brief account of the main currents of English philosophical speculation may sufficiently indicate the ultimate logical difficulties which lay at the bottom of all the great controversies of the day. The ultimate end of philosophy is to find the one in the many, to detect the permanent order which underlies the infinite variety of the universe as revealed to our

[1] For example, in the first law of motion, which Monboddo takes for a denial of his own principle that matter would remain at rest unless acted upon by a mind. ('Antient Metaphysics,' vol. ii. 349.)

perception. A definitive philosophy must, therefore, satisfy two conditions; it must, on the one hand, reveal principles unconditionally and invariably true; and, on the other, it must give formulæ applicable to the fluctuating series of interdependent phenomena. It seemed, for the present, as if one impulse could only be satisfied at the expense of the other. You seek for absolute truth? Then you must admit that the world which we perceive is an illusion—a mere screen of transitory appearances which hides the permanent realities behind; and you must retire to the world of transcendental reality, where, indeed, it is possible to obtain absolute truth, but truths which cannot by any ingenuity be brought into contact with the facts of perception, or made to influence our conduct. This was the choice of the ontological dogmatists; but their doctrine, already pushed to its legitimate consequences by the great thinkers of the seventeenth century, was feebly represented in the English speculation of the eighteenth. You prefer to be in contact with the observed phenomena, and repudiate this cloudland where the promise of absolute truth is fulfilled only by obtaining identical propositions cunningly transformed into the likeness of significant phrases, but turning out to be void of any relevant contents? Then you have, indeed, to do with phenomena, but you must take leave of absolute truth, and be content simply to observe the ceaseless flux of appearances, and to follow custom in the place of reason. The divorce between truth and reality was complete. No 'scientifical' truth, as Locke says—and Locke agrees with Descartes on the one hand and Hume on the other—is to be obtained in regard to the world of observation. You may either spin formulæ out of your brain indefinitely, and be perfectly certain that each is legitimately evolved from its predecessors, but find after all that your whole certainty comes to this, that A is A; or you may give up the attempt at certainty, and obtain any number of propositions which have the merit of being applicable to facts, but the demerit of being radically uncertain.

70. Few men, however, were thoroughgoing sceptics or dogmatists. Hume probably was the one systematic sceptic, and the perfectly logical dogmatism was hardly represented at all. Nearly all the English speculation of the period

lies at some point intermediate between these poles. The natural escape of the English mind was to some form of what was called common sense. The aim was to obtain a doctrine sufficiently plausible to give some kind of unity and of practical application. The votary of common sense sometimes refuses to ask the ultimate questions at all. He assumes that theology has some meaning and contains some truth; but he instinctively avoids probing its foundations too profoundly, or enquiring too rigidly into the connection between its premisses and its conclusions. This, in some form or other, is the commonest state of mind. Some thinkers leaned to the dogmatic side, and adopted a metaphysical theology, more or less straining the metaphysics on the one side and the traditional theology on the other, to bring them into harmony, and, according to their individual prejudices, retaining more or less of the traditional element. Others leant rather to the sceptical side, and abandoned the attempt to frame a philosophy at all; but here, too, scepticism combined itself either with a complete rejection of the old tradition, or with an acceptance of the tradition on the ground of its practical value. Hence emerges that curious form of heterogeneous opinion which professes to defend the ancient creed by attacking its sole philosophical justification, and which has in later years become more conspicuous in the attempt to distinguish between faith and reason. Whether it is at bottom sceptical or superstitious is a question of considerable interest, not here to be discussed. Common sense, again, might give itself the air of philosophy, and beg the ultimate questions which it is admittedly incapable of solving. Or, finally, it took the form of materialism, which really sets aside half the problem, thus reducing philosophy to a question of mechanics. In England, as we have seen, even this form of thought made a strange alliance with the old theology, until the crash of the French Revolution forced deeper issues upon men's minds, and the scepticism which had been latent under old forms of language, flashed into active life and indignant renunciation of the ancient dogmas.

71. To trace some of the resulting phases of opinion is the purpose of the following chapters. The picture, however, remains incomplete, and the explanation of the most con-

spicuous phenomena palpably inadequate, unless we always remember that the great mass of the population belongs to no school at all. It does not think, but feels. Below the social stratum accessible to philosophical thought, or even to its remotest echoes, lay the great masses, agitated by a rapid growth of material prosperity, increasing and multiplying so as to strain to the uttermost the powers of the old social framework, and ready, as the recognised leaders of thought became incompetent, to listen to any who could speak with authority. For authority in some shape—the authority of sound reason, or the authority of blind tradition, or the authority of some powerful wielder of imaginative symbols—must always guide the masses of mankind. What creed could sway the passionate yearnings and the dumb instincts of the multitude? Could Hume's scepticism fill the place of the old authoritative teaching, or Reid's common sense, or Wesley's rehabilitation of ancient dogma, or some new embodiment of scientific thought or dying tradition? That was the vital question, the answer to which would govern the development of popular opinion. This or that creed may be proved or confuted to the satisfaction of logicians; if it cannot stand that test, its vitality is feeble; but it must also be capable of impressing the imagination of the ignorant and the stupid, or it will remain an esoteric doctrine—a germ, it may be, capable of bringing forth fruit under some new social conditions, but not, for the time, capable of becoming an important factor in the intellectual development of the race.

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## NOTE TO CHAPTER I.

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## CHAPTER II.

### THE STARTING-POINT OF DEISM.

1. BOOKS which may fairly be considered as landmarks in the history of literature belong for the most part to one of two classes. They sum up the controversies of the past or open those of the coming generation. Two such books stand out as we cross the frontier line between two eras, which in the sphere of English politics is marked by the Revolution of 1688. From Locke's 'Essay' (1689) we may learn what were to be the dominant ideas of the next century; in Bossuet's 'Histoire des Variations' we find a summary of preceding thought.

2. No writer, it is probable, can have laid down his pen with a more triumphant sense of victory achieved than the great Catholic Bishop. He had exposed with extraordinary vigour the endless ramifications of Protestant sects; he had shown how, when once the old authority had been repudiated, men, guided by reason alone, had split and divided and subdivided, till every possible shade of opinion had found its representative and caused its schism. If unity be the test of truth, how could truth be found amongst this huddle of conflicting sects, or how accept any one solution when against it might be arrayed a whole series of rival solutions, each equally plausible, and each appealing ostensibly to the same authoritative record? Cease to dispute is the moral, and bow before the one Holy Church, the depository of the unbroken tradition of ages. Protestantism as a mere congeries of discordant errors must lead in speculation to scepticism, and in practice to the twin monstrosity—toleration. Bossuet taunts the Protestant Jurieu with his audacity in describing as 'inhuman, cruel, and barbarous,' the opinion which would sentence to damnation all who did not belong to a single communion.[1] The 'glory'

[1] 'Histoire des Variations,' book xv. § 51.

of inventing the contrary opinion ('glory' is used ironically) belongs to the Socinians. Yet even Jurieu might shrink from the consequences of such a theory. 'No one ever believed or thought that an idolater could be saved under pretext of good faith; an error so gross, an impiety so manifest, was not compatible with good conscience.'[1] Jurieu had thought that Arians might be tolerated in the spirit of peace. 'Who hinders, then,' asks Bossuet ironically, 'that *in the spirit of peace* the Socinians may be tolerated as the others are tolerated, and that charity may be extended even to their salvation?'[2] And when Basnage had spoken favourably of Dutch toleration, Bossuet retorts, 'It only remains to exclaim, happy country, where the heretic is at rest as well as the orthodox, where vipers are preserved like doves and innocent animals, where those who compound poisons enjoy the same tranquillity with those who prepare remedies; who would not admire the clemency of these reformed States?'[3]

3. The doctrine thus represented by Bossuet as an absurdity, from which even his adversaries would shrink, was rapidly becoming a truism with the Protestants. Happy Holland, they would say in all sincerity, the land which had sheltered free thought and philosophy through the long days of trial in the seventeenth century! The Socinians, if they had no other title to glory, might at least glory in that which their great opponent regarded as their shame. The appeal had lost its force. Deny the authority of Rome, says Bossuet, and you must deny every organ of authority in matters of opinion; deny its right to enforce its opinions, and you must tolerate Socinians; leave Rome in short, and you must give up hell in the next world and dragonnades in this. Englishmen were beginning to think that the loss would not be irreparable.

4. The noblest English literature in the seventeenth century gives the reverse side of these views. From the infinite variability of opinion our great writers deduced the necessity of toleration in the place of persecution and of rationalism in place of obedience to authority. Seeing that men unavoidably differ in profound speculations, they learnt to admit

[1] 'Histoire des Variations,' xv. § 59.
[2] Ib. xv. § 80.
[3] 'Défense de l'Histoire,' § 3.

the innocence of error. The most eloquent of Englishmen in the seventeenth century uttered the sentiments produced in manly minds by the sight of the endless wars, persecutions, bickerings, animosities, and furious passions, evolved in that deadly conflict of sects which was inflicting indelible wounds upon Europe. Milton's 'Areopagitica' is a permanent monument of noble thought embodied in majestic language. Jeremy Taylor's 'Liberty of Prophesying' bases the duty of almost unlimited toleration avowedly upon the sceptical ground. Chillingworth's spirit-stirring words, written some forty years before Bossuet's History, might serve for a counterblast to the voice of Church authority. 'Take away this persecuting, burning, cursing, damning of men for not subscribing to the words of men as the words of God; require of Christians only to believe Christ and to call no man master but Him only; let those leave claiming infallibility that have no title to it, and let them that in their words disclaim it, disclaim it likewise in their actions; in a word, take away tyranny, which is the devil's instrument to support errors, and superstitions, and impostors in the several parts of the world, which could not otherwise long withstand the power of truth; I say take away tyranny and restore Christians to the first and full liberty of captivating their understandings to Scripture only; and as rivers when they have a free passage run only to the ocean, so it may well be hoped, by God's blessing, that universal liberty, thus moderated, may quickly reduce Christendom to truth and liberty. These thoughts of peace (I am persuaded) may come from the God of peace, and to his blessing I commend them.'[1] Chillingworth was the countryman of Cromwell, not the subject of Louis XIV. When Locke, at a later period, wrote his letters on Toleration, he was but summing up the convictions which expressed passionate love of truth, and the righteous hatred of tyranny, of the greatest of his predecessors. The doctrine of toleration had been burnt into their minds by the struggles in which each party in turn had learnt by sad experience the evils of persecution.

5. The correlative doctrine of toleration is the necessity of founding all opinion on results obtained by the freest use of the privilege granted. Protestantism was doubtless a

[1] Chillingworth, p. 198 (edition 1638).

moral, before it was an intellectual, revolt. The attack upon Rome was instigated by the corruption of its representatives more directly than by the errors of its creed. But as the intellect freed itself from the old authority, the mere stress of the argument forced Protestants gradually to fall back upon first principles. Chillingworth's favourite maxim, 'the Bible is the religion of Protestants,' assumes that the authority of the Bible is a matter upon which all Christians are agreed. Whilst the common tenet exists, it is not necessary to go further back, or to enquire into the ground upon which it reposes. But if the question be asked, his answer is clear. 'If Scripture,' he says, 'cannot be the judge of any controversy, how shall that touching the Church and the notes of it be determined? And if it be the sole judge of this one, why may it not of others? Why not of all? Those only excepted wherein the Scripture itself is the subject of the question, which cannot be determined but by natural reason, the only principle, beside Scripture, which is common to Christians.'[1] As sects ramified, it was necessary to fall back further for a principle common to all; the same method, therefore, which caused Chillingworth to appeal to Scripture, implied an appeal to reason as soon as Scripture authority should be impugned. And, in fact, the great Protestant divines of the seventeenth century are rationalist in principle, though they might long receive as equivalent to an ultimate, because a universally acknowledged truth, the authority of the Scriptures or of the early Fathers. Thus, in many of their arguments it is sufficient to substitute Revelation for Rome to make the attack upon Catholicism available for an attack upon all supernatural authority. Their reasoning has a wider sweep than they imagine. Striking at the most prominent embodiment of the hostile principle, they are striking at tenets which they would themselves regard as sacred. Chillingworth found a congenial successor in Tillotson, the writer of the seventeenth century who was most generally read and admired in the eighteenth. The admiration extended to his style. Dryden professed to have learnt English prose from his writings; Addison meant to found an English dictionary upon them, and bestows a copy of his sermons upon the

[1] Chillingworth, p. 53.

excellent chaplain of Sir Roger de Coverley. The most tangible testimony to his wide popularity is that the copyright of his posthumous sermons was sold for 2,500 guineas. This popularity could not be due to any great merits in the rhetoric; for Tillotson can never have been a lively writer; but he had the merit, which is naturally confounded with literary excellence, of expressing fully the vein of thought most characteristic of his later contemporaries. Now, Tillotson, who died in 1694, whilst the struggle against Louis XIV. was still at its height, is principally occupied with the Roman controversy; and his language becomes more nervous and pithy whenever he feels the presence of the enemy But, in assaulting Rome, Tillotson constantly adopts the line of argument, and frequently uses the very language, afterwards turned to account by the sceptics. One case is specially remarkable. Hume avowedly founds his essay on Miracles upon Tillotson's favourite argument against Transubstantiation [1]—namely, that the doctrine is contrary to the testimony of all our senses, whereas the evidence in its favour can only rest upon one. The argument is evidently applicable to other controversies than the sacramental; and this is only one instance of a general tendency. 'Nothing,' he says emphatically, 'ought to be received as a revelation from God which plainly contradicts the principles of natural religion.' 'And nothing,' he adds, 'ought to be received as a divine doctrine or revelation without good proof that it is so.' No argument will prove a doctrine to be divine 'which is not clearer and stronger than the difficulties and objections against it.' [2] With this unequivocal assertion of the rationalist principle are connected other arguments which were frequently turned to account by the deists. They are glad to quote his assertion that, if all the great mathematicians of all ages met together in synod and declared that two and two did not make four, he would not believe them.[3] Suppose such a synod should have said that three and one were the same? Or, to give one more instance, can anything be more 'ludicrous,' he asks, in the 'Rule of Faith,' 'than first to build all our cer-

[1] 'Rule of Faith,' part. iii. § 9. Tillotson repeats it more than once in his sermons.

[2] Tillotson, 'Sermons,' vol. i. 225.

[3] Ib. p. 589.

tainty of the assistance of the Holy Ghost upon the certainty of tradition, and then afterwards to make the certainty of tradition rely upon the assistance of the Holy Ghost?'[1] This is identical with a favourite dilemma, by which Tindal greatly vexed some of his antagonists; he urged the absurdity of making Christian teaching depend upon our belief of miracles, and our belief of miracles on the truth of the Christian teaching. Each writer says that to appeal to authority is to argue in a circle. It was not without reason that Collins spoke of Tillotson as one 'whom all English free-thinkers own as their head.'[2] The Protestant writers against Rome were forging the weapons which were soon to be used against themselves. The assumptions which were common to them and to their antagonists naturally escaped any strict scrutiny, though it was presently to appear that they were equally assailable by the methods employed against assumptions actually disputed.

6. Beyond the limits, however, of this particular controversy, the same tendency is observable in a wider sense. The unconsciousness with which men like Tillotson put forward arguments capable of being turned against themselves explains one secret of their strength. If Protestantism was unintentionally acting as a screen for rationalism, rationalism naturally expressed itself in terms of Protestantism. Whatever, that is, was gained by reason was gained by the Protestants. The intellect, though it had broken the old barriers, was still, to a great degree, running in the old channels. Content with clearing away the grosser superstitions, it gave fresh life to the central beliefs. The vigour of English theology at this period—and it was the golden period of English theology—is due to the fact that, for the time, reason and Christian theology were in spontaneous alliance. The theologians of the middle and end of the seventeenth century, Taylor and Barrow and Cudworth and Leighton, were anxious to construct a philosophical religion, and they were not alive to the possibility that such a religion might cease to be Christian. If they rationalise, as the remarkable school of Cambridge Platonists rationalised, it is with a sincere belief that they are only bringing out the full meaning of the

[1] Tillotson, p. 742. [2] Collins, 'Discourse of Freethinking,' p. 171.

doctrine which they expound; purifying it from human accretions, and softening the crude edges left by ignorant interpreters. Such a process is perfectly natural, as in other times it was natural to fix allegorical meanings upon texts which shocked the spiritual sense of commentators. It was not an artifice consciously adopted to evade difficulties, but the spontaneous aspiration of the free intellect labouring in all sincerity to bring out the deepest meaning of the divine teaching. So, too, men like Barrow and Cudworth undertook the dangerous task of demonstrating the fundamental tenets of theology. The deist Collins said, sarcastically, that nobody doubted the existence of the Deity until the Boyle lecturers had undertaken to prove it. There is some truth in his satire, for such demonstrations naturally evoked scepticism, if they did not prove that it was already present in a latent form. But the process had not yet developed itself so far as to imply any insincerity in the reasoners. A doctrine is first received as an intuitive truth, standing beyond all need of demonstration; then it becomes the object of rigid demonstration; afterwards the demonstration ceases to be conclusive, and is merely probable; and, finally, the effort is limited to demonstrating that there is no conclusive reason on the other side. In the later stages of belief, the show of demonstration is a mere bluster, or is useful only to trip up an antagonist. In the earlier, it represents a genuine conviction, though a conviction which feels the necessity of justifying itself. The divines of the seventeenth century believed sincerely that theology could be exhibited as a body of necessary truth, and, further, that all arguments in favour of theology must tell equally in favour of Christianity. Scepticism, indeed, had shown itself in principle, and had demanded the production of proof. Some sceptics, doubtless, had gone further. In England, the great representative of destructive opinions was Hobbes, one of the acutest of all English philosophers, and a man whose influence in stimulating thought it would be difficult to over-estimate. Whatever may have been Hobbes's real sentiments, and he was exceedingly careful to give no handle to his antagonists, he was universally set down as an atheist. He was regarded as the living exponent of the old atomic philosophy of Epicurus, and was, therefore,

a convenient anvil for the hammers of orthodox opponents. His daring speculations were encountered by the attempt to construct a philosophical theology which could be expressed in the orthodox phraseology. And thus the religious teaching of the century, when it did not take the form of controversy between rival sects of Christians, was the exposition of a philosophy distinguished from that of Rome because appealing avowedly to rational tests, and opposed only by a purely sceptical tendency, which appeared to be wantonly paradoxical in theory and combined with dissolute maxims in practice.

7. A change, however, was slowly but inevitably approaching. Philosophy, hitherto in alliance with Christianity, began to show indications of a possible divorce. Though philosophers might use the old language, it became daily more difficult to identify the God of philosophy with the God of Christianity. How could the tutelary deity of a petty tribe be the God who ruled over all things and all men? How could even the God of the mediæval imagination, the God worshipped by Christians when Christendom was regarded as approximately identical with the universe, be still the ruler of the whole earth, in which Christians formed but a small minority, and of the universe, in which the earth was but as a grain of sand on the seashore? Or how, again, could the personal Deity, whose attributes and history were known by tradition, be the God whose existence was inferred by philosophers from the general order of the universe; or regarded as a necessary postulate for the discovery of all truth? If there was no absolute logical conflict between the two views, the two modes of conceiving the universe refused to coalesce in the imagination.

8. The difficulty revealed itself in various directions. The great astronomical and geographical discoveries enlarged men's conceptions—it is no paradox—of the Infinite. As distant countries, whose existence had scarcely touched men's thoughts in former ages, or which had been conceived as lying in some dim borderland rimming the bright circle of Christendom, came daily into closer contact with ordinary life, the true proportions of human history became manifest. Christendom was but a fragment of the world. Millions upon

millions of human beings had never even heard of its existence; they knew nothing of the one true faith, which to know was life everlasting, and not to know was to incur everlasting torment. Could all the Chinese, for example, be damned because they knew nothing of an event which, so far as they were concerned, might as well have happened on the moon? If not damned, and if, in fact, they were about as happy and virtuous as Christians, could the Christian faith be necessary either in this world or the next? Throughout the eighteenth century, the deists are always taunting the orthodox with this startling fact of three hundred million Chinamen whose case cannot be squared with the old theories. The revelations of astronomy were even more impressive to the imagination. Once men could think of their little planet as itself the universe, consisting of a level plain a few miles in breadth, and roofed by the solid vault carrying our convenient lighting apparatus. The revelation, finally clenched by Newton's astonishing discovery, that the world was an atom in space, whirling round the sun, itself, perhaps, another atom, utterly crushed the old imaginations which still survive in Milton's poetry. The scenery had become too wide for the drama. It was possible, indeed, verbally to promote the Jewish deity to rule over the vast territory which had thus sprung into existence. Newton himself was unconscious of the bearing of his discoveries upon the traditional theology, and bent his mighty intellect to that process of solving riddles which he called interpreting the prophecies. But though the traditionary mythology was not forced by a clear logical necessity to postulate a limited earth and heavens, it became more shadowy and dim when confronted with the new cosmology. Through the roof of the little theatre on which the drama of man's history had been enacted, men began to see the eternal stars shining in silent contempt upon their petty imaginings. They began to suspect that the whole scenery was but a fabric woven by their imaginations. Another doubt was already dawning. It was long before science was to be formally opposed to revelation, and the Mosaic cosmogony to be directly attacked. And yet, it was already whispered that the first chapter of Genesis was hardly an adequate prologue to the development of the universal drama. Geology, still in its

earliest infancy, had prompted Thomas Burnet to suggest an allegorical interpretation of the primitive records. Like many other rationalisers he fancied himself to be confirming instead of weakening scriptural authority; but his intimations indicate that the universe must be extended in time as well as in space, and that the traditional 6,000 years hardly gave room enough to the scientific imagination. Controversialists were beginning to deal with the question destined to excite so wearisome a series of wranglings. Whiston was already publishing, in 1696, one of the first proofs that 'the creation of the world in six days, the universal deluge, and the general conflagration, as laid down in the Holy Scriptures,' were 'perfectly agreeable to religion and philosophy.'

9. The consequences were already developing themselves before the close of the century. The problem which presented itself to the orthodox was to reconcile the ancient with the modern order of thought. How was the God of Christian tradition to be identified with the God of abstract reasoning? How could Jehovah be equivalent to nature? Philosophers aimed at framing demonstrations of theology independent of any special experience. A theology so framed, though it might use the old terms, could not be permanently retained within the old channels. The special form which the difficulty presented was determined by the rapid extension of the ancient conceptions. The universe, which had been potentially infinite, was becoming actually infinite. The old formula 'quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus,' was beginning to show its power in a new shape. So long as heretics and heathens could be excluded by the imagination from *omnes*; so long as *ubique* could be confined to Europe, and *semper* to the last few hundred years, it might be used unhesitatingly by Catholics. But the meaning was altered. If *omnes* was to include all the Christian sects whose variations excited Bossuet's contempt, the true faith must be that residuum which was common to all so-called Christians. In the language of the time this problem thus presented was to make out a list of fundamentals—of articles of faith, that is, which were necessary to salvation; and the difficulty of accomplishing the task supplied the Catholic controversialists with many taunts against their adversaries. But suppose that in *omnes*

should be included not only Christians but the heathen, and in *ubique* the whole planet; whilst *semper* should be extended backwards to the dim vista of past ages, then the true faith must be identified with that universal religion of nature, implanted in all men's hearts by their Creator, and, unfortunately, evading research more persistently even than the Christian list of fundamentals. The attempt, however, had already been made. Lord Herbert of Cherbury published so early as 1624 his 'De Veritate,' and there sets forth five fundamental propositions of natural religion; these affirm the existence of God, the duty of worshipping him, the importance of piety and virtue as the chief parts of this duty, the propriety of repentance, and the existence of a future state of rewards and punishments. Fifty years later Spinoza, in the 'Tractatus Theologico-Politicus,' gives a similar list, asserting God's existence, unity, omnipresence, and supremacy; declaring that he is to be worshipped exclusively by charity and justice; that all who thus obey will be saved and others lost; and that he will forgive the sins of the penitent.[1] In these lists there is no specifically Christian doctrine; and we are thus in presence of a distinct attempt to construct a religious creed upon an independent basis. Spinoza's God is nature. What, then, is the relation of the religion of nature to the ancient creed? That is the vital question; for the contrast had become too unmistakable to be easily masked by any process of rationalisation. Should there be an alliance or hostility between the old and the new? An alliance might be attained, as some thought, by stretching as widely as possible the meaning of the old language, and by representing the substance of the two creeds as identical, and regarding the doctrines revealed by Christ as useful or necessary additions to the doctrines revealed by nature. That was the natural course for men who felt the immense importance to mankind of religious beliefs, or were comparatively indifferent to symmetrical reasoning. Surely the old creed, which had lasted so many centuries, and been moulded by the thoughts and feelings of so many generations, might be stretched a little further! Others, more impressed by the evils of eccle-

[1] Spinoza, 'Tractatus,' &c., pp. 235–6.

siastical authority on the one side, or of license on the other, might do their best to accentuate the differences of the two creeds. On the orthodox side, this led to the attempt to expose the futility of the new creed; and on the infidel side to the attempt to expose the weakness of the claims to authority. The critical movement was already showing itself. Whilst Chillingworth was unsuspectingly proclaiming that the Bible was the religion of Protestants, Hobbes was discovering that the Bible itself must be submitted to the test of historical criticism, and his remarks, though cursory, give the vital principle of all later criticism.[1] Spinoza, with greater boldness or perspicuity, carries out the same argument in a more systematic form in the 'Tractatus.' And by the end of the century the keen criticism of Bayle was beginning to pierce in many directions the joints of the orthodox armour.

10. Here, then, is the starting-point of the deist controversy. From the variation of opinions Bossuet inferred that all, save one, should be stamped out. The inevitable tendency of such a method was already seen by the more acute minds. To support a religion by force instead of argument is to admit that argument condemns it. In other words, it is to sanction scepticism; and before the end of the coming century, Bossuet's countrymen had to reap the harvest of which the seeds were sown by this desperate policy. The English theologians, accustomed to trust in reason, though with some heterogeneous admixture of tradition, and to practise toleration, though with many limitations, adopted a different course. Since men differ hopelessly on many points, let us take that in which all agree. That surely must be the essence of religion and the teaching of universal reason. Thus we shall be able to found a reasonable Christianity. You must go further, said the deists, and take only the axioms common to all men. Thus we shall found, if not a reasonable Christianity, yet a religion of reason. The various eddies of opinion which were formed by the conflict of these diverging currents form the staple of the theological discussions of the coming period.

11. One result of the English toleration and rationalism, and it may be, of the English love of compromise, necessarily

[1] See 'Leviathan' (1651), ch. xxxiii.

affected the process of thought. In England, in fact, theology had become so profoundly penetrated with rationalism, that the attempt to frame a permanent reconciliation had a far more hopeful appearance than in Catholic countries. The result was that the most eminent English thinkers were generally arrayed upon the orthodox side. They could find liberty enough to satisfy their logical instincts within the old lines; and saw no sufficient advantage in pushing forwards into the unknown regions of Deism. The orthodox party had thus every advantage which could be given by ability, learning, and prestige. It would be difficult to mention a controversy in which there was a greater disparity of force. The physiognomy of the books themselves bears marks of the difference. The deist writings are but shabby and shrivelled little octavos, generally anonymous, such as lurk in the corners of dusty shelves, and seem to be the predestined prey of moths. Against them are arrayed solid octavos and handsome quartos and at times even folios—very Goliahs among books, too ponderous for the indolence of our degenerate days, but fitting representatives of the learned dignitaries who compiled them. On the side of Christianity, indeed, appeared all that was intellectually venerable in England. Amongst the champions of the faith might be reckoned Bentley, incomparably the first critic of the day; Locke, the intellectual ruler of the eighteenth century; Berkeley, acutest of English metaphysicians and most graceful of philosophic writers; Clarke, whom we may still respect as a vigorous gladiator, and then enjoying the reputation of a great master of philosophic thought; Butler, the most patient, original, and candid of philosophical theologians; Waterland, the most learned of contemporary divines; and Warburton, the rather knock-kneed giant of theology, whose swashing blows, if too apt to fall upon his allies, represented at least a rough intellectual vigour. Around those great names gathered the dignitaries of the Church, and those who aspired to church dignity, for the dissection of a deist was a recognised title to obtaining preferment. Sherlock and Gibson and Conybeare and Smalbroke, and other occupants of the bench, gained or justified promotion by their share in the crusade; and amongst the rank and file were such men as Sykes and Balguy and Stebbing, and a

host of other diligent penmen, now for the most part as much forgotten as their victims. The ablest of the nonjurors, Leslie and Law, the most industrious and eminent dissenters, Leland and Lardner and Foster and Doddridge, fought side by side with their brethren of the Establishment. Nor was the zeal for orthodoxy confined to official exponents of the creed. Lyttelton and Barrington turned from political warfare to deal a blow at the enemy ; Addison lost some of his natural amenity in striking at so contemptible a foe ; Pope, though allied to some refined unbelievers, pilloried the less polished in the 'Dunciad ;' Swift dropped some of his bitterest venom on the antagonists of the Church ; and Young and Blackmore confuted the infidel in verses which were once (Young's perhaps still are) studied by human beings. The ordinary feeling for the deist was a combination of the *odium theologicum* with the contempt of the finished scholar for the mere dabbler in letters. The names indeed of the despised deists make but a poor show when compared with this imposing list. They are but a ragged regiment, whose whole ammunition of learning was a trifle when compared with the abundant stores of a single light of orthodoxy ; whilst in speculative ability they were children by the side of some of their antagonists. Swift's sneers seem to be generally justified ; and their literary power would hardly have attracted attention if employed upon any other topic. Two of the deists, indeed, claimed respect as men of rank and of considerable pretensions to taste. But Shaftesbury, though a man of real power, attacked orthodoxy in the most oblique fashion ; and Bolingbroke's 'blunderbuss' missed fire, because discharged when the controversy was nearly extinct. Mandeville, perhaps the acutest of the deists, made, like Shaftesbury, an indirect and covert assault. Collins, a respectable country gentleman, showed considerable acuteness ; Toland, a poor denizen of Grub Street, and Tindal, a Fellow of All Souls, made a certain display of learning, and succeeded in planting some effective arguments. Below them we must make a rapid descent, to find fitting places for poor mad Woolston, most scandalous of the deists, and Chubb, the good Salisbury tallow-chandler, who ingenuously confesses, whilst criticising the Scriptures, that he knows no language but his own.

Morgan, and two or three anonymous writers, do little more than reflect the arguments of Tindal and Toland, and Annet, a broken-down schoolmaster, is a rather disreputable link between Woolston and Tom Paine. At the end of the deist controversy, indeed, there appeared two remarkable writers. Hume, the profoundest as well as the clearest of English philosophers of the century, struck a blow of which the echo is still vibrating; but Hume can scarcely be reckoned amongst the deists. He is already emerging into a higher atmosphere. Conyers Middleton, whose attack upon miracles eclipsed for a time that of his contemporary, was a formidable though covert ally of Deism, but belongs to the transition to a later period.

12. The deists suffered from another disadvantage besides their intellectual infirmity. They had to fight in fetters. Toleration, acknowledged in theory, was not yet pushed to its legitimate consequences. The English mind had arrived at one of its favourite compromises. The Church of England could no longer persecute, but it was still privileged. A dissenter was disqualified from office, though not regarded as a criminal. Near a century and a half was to elapse from the revolution which had given him a legal right to freedom of worship before the rights of other citizens were avowedly conferred upon him. The infidel was a degree lower. He was still liable to persecution, though seldom persecuted in practice. Even Locke had drawn the line of toleration above atheists and Roman Catholics, and certain laws—some of them not even yet repealed— made open assailants of orthodox Christianity liable to severe penalties. Occasionally the weapon, generally held in suspense above the heads of freethinkers, was allowed to descend, though with little severity, and pretty much at random. It was perfectly safe, and in some classes fashionable, to express sceptical opinions in conversation, but it was clearly disreputable, and not quite safe to publish them. If the governing classes hated priestcraft, and cared little for Christianity, they had a great value for decorum. A wretched man called Aikenhead was executed in Scotland, in the beginning of 1697, for some profane language to the students in Edinburgh, though he afterwards recanted and averred his belief in Christianity.[1] But in Eng-

[1] See the case in the 'State Trials,' vol. xiii. 918. 8vo edition.

land little harm was done. The deist books were occasionally burnt by the hangman, which probably served as an advertisement. Collins at one time thought it necessary to retire to Holland; poor Asgill was expelled from Parliament and ruined, for denying the necessity of death. Whiston lost his professorship for Arianism; Woolston was fined and imprisoned for language more significant of insanity than of intentional profanity; and at a later period Annet was pilloried and imprisoned for equally insulting language. But, as a rule, the deists escaped without injury; their creed exposed them to much obloquy, but little danger; and they were forced, not to conceal their opinions, but to cover them with a veil of decent ambiguity. Some of them have, in consequence, been regarded as sincere believers, and, on the other hand, they have been condemned for insidious dishonesty. The question of how far they saw the consequences of their own logic is of little interest to the historian of thought. We shall have to notice it incidentally hereafter.

13. When the sceptical movement had passed from England to France the disparity of intellect was inverted. Voltaire, the disciple of the English deists, found no disciple of Butler or Bentley to encounter him with equal ability. The persecution, on the other hand, by which the French movement was opposed was of a far more serious character. The two phenomena are naturally connected. In England, the rational Protestant could meet the deist half way. The line of demarcation was shifting and uncertain, and it is hard to say in many cases whether the old traditional element, or the modern rationalising element, predominates. Persecution would be anomalous between sects so faintly discriminated. In Catholic France a rigid and unbending system was confronted by a thoroughgoing scepticism. Men of intellect could find no half-way resting-place, and could disguise their true sentiments with no shreds of orthodox belief. What passed for Christianity in England would have been rank heresy in France; and thus the Catholic Church, unable to come to terms with the rationalists, met them by a free use of the weapons of authority. It is generally added that in England the orthodox party, forced to defend themselves by reason, won a triumph in argument as conclusive as might

be expected from their superiority in learning and ability. Whatever the truth of that boast, it is certain that the deist impulse showed rapid signs of decay. Burke could ask before the end of the century, 'Who ever reads them now?'[1] and even at a much earlier period the decline is palpable. 'What is become of all those poisonous books,' asks Seed before 1750, 'that were written about the close of the last century, nay of some of much later date?'[2] Had the deists, in fact, touched merely the surface of men's minds? Was their attack met by a genuine revival of theological belief? The question is interesting and curious. A survey of the controversy may suggest some answer.

[1] Godwin, too, says in the 'Political Justice,' that it is not absolutely certain that the deists had the worst of the argument. 'Yet fifty years after the agitation of these controversies their effects could scarcely be traced, and things appeared on all sides as if the controversies had never existed.' 'Political Justice' (3rd edition), vol. i. 90.

[2] Seed's 'Discourses,' vol. i. 113.

# CHAPTER III.

## CONSTRUCTIVE DEISM.

### *I. INTRODUCTORY.*

1. A CLASSIFICATION of the writers in the deist controversy according to the true affinities of thought would by no means coincide with a classification according to their avowed sympathies. Listen, indeed, to the war-cries which arose from the field of battle, and nothing could seem more definite than the issues involved. On one side were arrayed all who professed and called themselves Christians; on the other, the despicable banditti stigmatised by their opponents as deists or atheists—names which, significantly enough, were assumed to be strictly synonymous. Is the Bible a forgery, or the word of the living God? Is Christianity an imposture, or the light which alone can lighten the world? Such—if we may believe the Christian apologists—were the simple shibboleths by which the two parties might be distinguished; and it was only natural for the more bigoted writers to infer that the same marks would serve to distinguish good men from bad men, the wise from the fools, and those who had a fair prospect of salvation from those who were in imminent danger of everlasting hell-fire. And yet, look a little closer, and the distinction loses its importance. Many an honest crusader, who had assumed in all sincerity the badge of the true faith, was, in fact, a rationalist to the core; the orthodox flag covered differences wider than those which separated its followers from its enemies; and in many cases nothing was wanting but a slight change in the point of view, or a little more knowledge of critical results, to alter the whole distribution of the forces. The Christianity of many writers consisted simply in expressing deist opinions in the old-fashioned phraseology. But the substantial similarity of opinion did not invariably soften the bitterness with which the adherents of the old formulæ regarded those who declined to put the new wine into old

bottles. No one is more offensive than the man who strips your thought of the disguises most carefully prepared.

2. As a natural result, the controversialists were even more short-sighted than usual ; perplexed by the noise and confusion around them, they failed to perceive certain tendencies of thought sufficiently clear to men standing upon the vantage-ground of later experience. Their eyes were fixed on the superficial ripple which seemed to them a storm of serious magnitude, though to us interesting chiefly as indicating the direction in which the great tidal movements were setting beneath the surface. The arguments used on both sides have lost much of their meaning to us. Many of them rested on historical assumptions, long since dispersed into thin air ; others implied a partial glimpse of truths whose real bearing could not then be appreciated ; and some involved the use of philosophical assumptions as exploded as any philosophical error can be—that is to say, now disguised under an entirely different form. The entrenchments thrown up by the orthodox, and the batteries pointed against them by unbelievers, are as obsolete as the feudal castles in the days of modern artillery. And yet, though the issues are perplexed, the methods inadequate, and the disputants imperfectly conscious of their own meaning, the controversy has its interest, not merely in an historical sense, but as anticipating many later developments of thought.

3. As religious speculation began to withdraw from the controverted dogmas, and for the appeal to churches or Scriptures to substitute an exclusive appeal to reason, the framework of supernaturalism began to show symptoms of weakness. The question occurred whether that framework was not altogether superfluous. Why not knock away these antiquated props, and leave a symmetrical edifice of rational doctrine, the firmer when freed from supports that had become encumbrances? To this it was replied, in the first place, that an efficient creed could not be constructed without the aid of revelation. Unassisted reason could not lay down such a chart of the universe as would suffice for human guidance. It was asserted, in the next place, that, as a matter of fact, a supernatural intervention had actually occurred. Christianity, in short, supplied a vital want of human nature,

and the facts which it asserted could be satisfactorily proved. The controversy thus fell into two divisions, corresponding to what were called the internal and external evidences of Christianity. Though both questions were raised from the beginning of the period, the argument on the internal evidence has the priority in the order of thought. The doubts as to the facts were preceded by the doubts as to the value of the established creed. Christianity was called upon to show its title-deeds, when it failed to satisfy the moral and intellectual needs of the time. Certain doubts about Eve's apple and Balaam's ass might be smouldering here and there, but they only gained importance as the creed in which they were held to be inextricably bound up was assailed for other reasons. They were not the original cause of offence, though they were irresistibly tempting to scoffers when once the prestige of the creed was weakened. I shall begin, therefore, with that current of feeling which sprang from the deepest sources and most profoundly affected men's minds.

## II. LOCKE AND TOLAND.

4. Though there had been many premonitory symptoms of the coming storm, the controversy may be said to have first come definitely to life in the last years of the seventeenth century. Two books appeared in 1695 and 1696 respectively, whose titles are curiously significant: Locke's 'Reasonableness of Christianity,' and Toland's 'Christianity not Mysterious.' The conjunction was rather unfortunate, though not accidental. Toland attempted to gain a place in social and literary esteem by boasting of intimacy with Locke, and by engrafting his speculations upon Locke's doctrines.[1] Locke emphatically repudiated this unfortunate disciple, whose personal acquaintance with him was slight, and whose theories he altogether disavowed. The connection, indeed,

[1] Pope says, in a suppressed couplet of the 'Essay on Man,'

> 'What partly pleases, totally will shock:
> I question much if Toland would be Locke'—

meaning to say, as Warburton tells us, that a little man would not change places with a great man in his own line.

was little calculated to reflect credit upon the great man, and yet there was an uncomfortable plausibility in his follower's claim to be at least a humble adherent. Locke, though his manifest irritation at the charge made his conduct to Toland rather harsh, was unmistakably free from the slightest complicity, direct or indirect, in any attack upon the authenticity of the Christian revelation. Locke's candour breathes in every line of his work. He has an unmistakable right to his place in that roll-call of eminent believers which is to this day thundered from pulpits against the pride of the infidel. No child or clergyman of the present time could accept the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures with a simpler faith than this intellectual progenitor of the whole generation of eighteenth-century iconoclasts—the teacher of Toland and Collins, the legitimate precursor of Hume and of Condillac, the philosopher before whom Voltaire is never tired of prostrating himself with unwonted reverence. There is no sign of a consciousness that biblical criticism may turn out to be a destructive agent, and scarcely of a consciousness that it exists. Like Chillingworth, whose congenial intellect excites his admiration,[1] he accepts the authority at once of reason and of the Bible ; and never suspects that there will be any difficulty in serving the two masters. Some persons, indeed, may conceivably reject the whole book as an imposture, but he recognises no medium between that monstrous hypothesis and the acceptance of every word as inspired. If, in this respect, Locke was behind the more cultivated writers of his time, the origin, the method, and the whole tone of his treatises are curiously characteristic of the thought of the coming generation. Whatever his other merits or defects, Locke strikes, in all subjects of which he treats, the keynote of English speculation in the eighteenth century.

5. One day, so he tells us, he was thinking of a controversy then raging amongst dissenters, when it occurred to him to enquire into the 'question about justification,' and thence, by a natural transition, to ask what is the faith which justifies ?[2] To satisfy himself, he adopted a plan analogous to that which had produced the 'Essay on the Human Understanding.' Casting aside the infinite masses of learned specu-

[1] Locke's Works, vol. iii. 275 ; vol. vi. 252, 276, &c. [2] Ib. vi. 187.

lation under which the whole subject had been buried, till it was crushed and distorted out of shape, he resolved simply to use his eyes to see what was before him. The process was so uncommon that it might be expected to produce novel results. In short, he read his New Testament without note or comment, as it might have been read by a youthful disciple of a modern dissenting preacher. No such student could have more summarily swept aside the labours of commentators, divines, and the whole tribe of exegetical Dryasdusts, than this venerable philosopher. As he read, the old words, doubtless familiar enough, dazzled him with new light. The meaning seemed to him so plain that he could not understand how anyone could have missed it. As the discovery grew upon his mind, he wondered more and more at the harmony which slowly disclosed itself—at the indications of the 'marvellous and divine wisdom of our Saviour's conduct,' and at the conclusive proof afforded both of the truth of the narrative and of the utility of its teaching to mankind. The studies thus simply conducted had been undertaken for his own private satisfaction. But at length his conviction that he was able to place in a new light the infinite superiority of the Gospel-teaching to all human wisdom, and to obviate objections resting upon the confusion between the true Gospel and the spurious theology elaborated by scholastic divines, induced him to give his conclusions to the world. They were apparently destined, in his mind, to sweep away the rubbish of theologians, as his essay was to sweep away the rubbish of metaphysicians.

6. The sincerity of the narrative is obvious, and the construction of the book bears witness to it. The greater part is a long, and as his adversary justly remarks, a tedious, catena of texts, intended to establish his great discovery. Locke, to say the truth, has the weakness not uncommon with men of robust intellect and strong persuasions. He is capable of becoming tedious. He produces his materials at full length, and plods steadily through the Gospels and the Acts, accumulating proof after proof of his discovery. Stated simply, it amounts to this: Christ and his apostles, on admitting converts to the Church, did not exact from them a profession of belief in the Athanasian Creed, the Thirty-nine Articles, or the Westminster Confession, but were satisfied with the

acknowledgment that Christ was the Messiah. This, then, is the one essential article of faith, except, indeed, that to it must be added, unless it be taken to include, a belief in the one true God. 'Nobody can add to these fundamental articles of faith, nor make any other necessary but what God hath made and declared to be so.' Here, then, is a plain simple religion, fitted to the comprehension of 'labouring and illiterate men,' and free from those niceties with which 'writers and wranglers in religion have filled it,' as though there were no way into the Church but through the 'academy or lyceum.'[1]

7. Locke's discovery is not in itself very startling; and it is rather odd, though characteristic of his indifference to authority, that he should have supposed it to be new. A book, for example, called the 'Naked Gospel,' by Arthur Bury, rector of Exeter College, had been burnt by the University of Oxford in 1690 for its defence of a very similar doctrine. Locke's treatise provoked an attack from a Mr. Edwards, who was excusably angry at any attempt to lower the conditions of salvation. He thought it hard that anybody should be saved who differed from himself in regard to original sin, justification by faith, the atonement, and in indefinite lists of other doctrines. Locke, it appeared to him, was at one fell swoop demolishing the whole creed, with the exception of a single article, and he was scandalised at the prospects held out by implication to an infinite variety of sects. Locke, at great length, explained the sufficiently obvious point that a belief in Christ involved a belief in all the doctrines known to come from Christ. No man can be a Christian who at once admits that Christ teaches a given doctrine, and asserts that the doctrine is false. But we can only demand from him an explicit belief of the doctrines which he apprehends to be taught in the Scriptures, and an implicit belief of 'all the rest, which he is ready to believe so soon as it shall please God . . . . to enlighten him.'[2] Hence it follows, and this is Locke's main point, that the attempt to fix 'a catalogue of fundamentals' is illusory. This 'every-one alone can make for himself; nobody can fix it for him; nobody can collect or prescribe it to another; but this is according as God dealt to every man the measure of light and

[1] Locke's Works, vi. 157. [2] 232.

faith; and has opened every man's understanding that he may understand the Scriptures.'[1] Locke's view, in short, is that every man becomes a Christian who accepts allegiance to Christ as his King. He must obey, so far as he knows them, the King's laws; but he need not know them all—an obligation, as he observes, never yet imposed upon the subjects of any kingdom.[2] To the faith, indeed, which he shares with the devils, that Christ is the Messiah, he must add repentance and willingness to obey. But those conditions being fulfilled, he may be 'solemnly incorporated into the kingdom,'[3] and must live as becomes an obedient subject. Yet some shred of the old invincible prejudice which attaches sinfulness to honest opinion, still perplexed even this straightforward intellect. Sensible men do not like to go into extremes, and therefore it is that men of sense make so many blunders. Locke, indeed, asserts boldly that those who lived before Christ could not be doomed for the want of Christian faith, and that for the plain reason that 'nobody was or can be required to believe what was never proposed to him to believe.'[4] He seems, however, to be thinking chiefly[5] of those whose prospective faith in the fulfilment of God's promises of a Messiah might stand in lieu of the retrospective faith that the Messiah had already appeared. He says that there seems to be 'something more of weight'[6] in the difficulty as to the heathen who had never heard a word of the prophecy or of its fulfilment. The same principle, one would have thought, might cover this case also; and Locke, though in more guarded language, accepts the charitable conclusion. If, however, the further difficulty had been raised as to the fate of those who, having heard, had not been convinced, he would apparently have been staggered a little. The tendency of his logic is plain enough: the qualifications for heaven are reduced to a minimum; but he does not explicitly reach the conclusion that intellectual error is not by itself sinful.

8. Thus far Locke is following in the track of the old controversies. He is still discussing that strange question evolved by the collision of rival sects, to what erroneous opinions God had annexed the tremendous penalty of eternal

[1] Locke's Works, vi. 233.
[2] Ib. p. 231.
[3] Ib. p. 111.
[4] Ib. p. 128.
[5] Ib. p. 128.
[6] Ib. p. 132.

damnation. So faint a shadow of the old ferocious doctrine now creeps about the dark places of the world, that it is not without amazement that we see it still haunting, even in the most attenuated shape, so wise and tolerant an intellect. During the ensuing controversies it pretty well disappears from sight; and shows itself, at most, by occasionally prompting an expression of spitefully charitable hope for the soul of an antagonist. But as the ghastly superstition disappeared, there naturally arose the further question, which was to occupy men's minds for the coming years—If men of all creeds might be saved, what need was there of a Saviour? Is not the light of nature sufficient? When Christian theology is not guarded by this dreadful phantom, why should we believe in its special sanctity? If all creeds open a path to heaven; if Socrates and Cicero may be saved as well as Paul and Peter, why should one creed be exalted as essentially superior to others? To such question Locke gives the answer which was urged in various forms against the whole race of deists. It is short and plain, and though the mode of expression seems crude to modern readers, it is, perhaps, not widely different in substance from that which meets acceptance at the present day. At any rate, it may be briefly summed up as giving the text afterwards expounded throughout a voluminous literature. Its essence lies in the assertion that Christianity is practically useful. Without its aid, indeed, 'the rational and thinking part of mankind'[1] might, and in fact did, discover the 'one supreme, invisible God;'[1] but to the great bulk of the race, that central light remained inaccessible. Revelation was shut up in a little corner of the world. The vast multitudes of Gentiles 'could have no attestation of the miracles on which the Hebrews built their faith,'[2] except by difficult and rare communications with an obscure race. The Christian miracles, on the contrary, were so frequent and so public as to be notorious to the whole world, and could not be impeached by the enemies of the new creed, 'no, not Julian himself.'[3] Without the aid of Christianity, again, philosophers might discover the law of nature, though human reason 'never from unquestionable

[1] Locke's Works, vi. 135. [2] Ib. p. 137.
[3] Ib. p. 138.

principles by clear deductions made out an entire body'[1] of that law. Assuming—what, however, he does not admit—that all moral precepts of the Gospel have been discovered by some one or other of the philosophers; by Solon and Bias, and Tully, and Confucius and Anacharsis, yet mankind at large would not without the Gospel possess an 'unquestionable rule of life and manners.'[2] And still less could a number of 'incoherent apophthegms' possess a binding legal force. A philosopher has not the authority of a legislator. Christ has given us a complete code, and produced Divine testimony for his authority. Morality, even if not extended, is placed on an immovable basis. For the mass of mankind the difference is vital. Even if philosophy had 'from undeniable principles given us ethics in a science like mathematics, in every way demonstrable,'[3] yet demonstration flies above the heads of the crowd. Doubts, when they arose, could only be solved by following out a complex 'thread of coherent deductions;' and hence 'you may as soon expect to have all the day-labourers and tradesmen, the spinsters and dairymaids, perfect mathematicians, as to have them perfect in ethics in this way.'[3] Christianity, again, enables us to practise the code thus authoritatively set forth. It substituted a pure and spiritual worship for the complex rites and ceremonies of ancient religions. 'Decency, order, and edification' alone were required, instead of 'stately buildings, costly ornaments, peculiar and uncouth habits, and a numerous huddle of pompous, fantastical, cumbersome ceremonies.'[4] Yet more potent was the substitution of the sure and certain hope of a resurrection for the vague talk of poets about manes and ghosts, about Styx and Acheron and Elysian fields, savouring more of 'the inventions of wit and the ornaments of poetry than the serious persuasions of the grave and sober.'[5] Christ brought life and immortality to light, not merely by the clear revelation of the truth, but by the assurance conveyed in his own resurrection and ascension. And, finally, Christ has bestowed upon us one more advantage in the promise of his assistance. We know not how the spirit of God will work upon us, but we

[1] Locke's Works, vi. 140.
[2] Ib. p. 141.
[3] Ib p. 146.
[4] Ib. pp. 147-8.
[5] Ib. p. 149.

cannot doubt henceforward that an Almighty arm is ready to guide us through the dangers and temptations of the world.

9. Here, then, is the thesis laid down by the typical thinker of the age, to be incessantly attacked and defended through the next century. Locke's view of Christianity entirely ignores the aspects of the faith which have in other days been most prominent. A rationalist to the core, he does not even contemplate as possible an appeal to any authority but that of ordinary reason. The truth of Christianity is to be proved like the truth of any historical or philosophical theory. It was simply a question of evidence, and especially of the overwhelming evidence of the Christian miracles. The fact, indeed, that those miracles were wrought in confirmation of a perfect system of morality, made it possible to accept them. But the excellence of that system appeared not from its transcending the limits of human knowledge, but from its entire coincidence with the teaching of the unassisted intellect. Christianity is regarded less as the revelation of the true relations of man to his Maker than as a new promulgation of the moral law. It makes notorious to all men the sanctions by which that law is enforced, and which they had previously dimly conjectured rather than decidedly believed. It regulates the mode in which men are to approach their Creator, and promises assistance in obeying him ; but though regulating and systematising the dictates of common sense, it does not—nay, it is its very glory and the proof of its supreme excellence that it does not—run counter to them or materially alter them. No visible outward guardian of the sacred mysteries, and no sublime internal faculty of insight into heavenly things, is necessary to maintain this prosaic but thoroughly sensible religion. The world, as Locke conceived it, had been in trouble owing to a mysterious alienation from its ruler. It had, indeed, confused recollections that such a ruler existed, and a dim knowledge of the general design of his legislation. But practically an anarchy existed, as when an Eastern despot has retired into the recesses of his palace and left his people to mind their own business. Christianity was a great legislative reform. The law was codified, published, and enforced by adequate sanctions, but not materially altered. In that

sense, Christianity was reasonable in the highest degree, and, in fact, was little more than a ratification of the vague rules established by unauthorised thinkers, with some promise of more active interference in future.

10. Locke's tendency to view Christianity as intended by its Divine Author to give new authority to the dictates of reason, though it did not lead him to exclude, naturally inclined him to assign to a subordinate position, those doctrines which are obviously unattainable by our unassisted intellects. He admitted, but he laid no stress upon them. The Almighty Ruler had, as Christians believed, condescended to reveal awful glimpses of the mysterious depths of his own nature, and into the mode of his government of the universe. Men of reverential spirit would regard those revelations in humble awe, without venturing to correct by their own speculations the direct intimations of the Deity. They would feel that the place whereon they stood was holy ground. Divines, however, had brought their metaphysical scales and measuring-rods into that Holy of Holies, where angels would stand with averted gaze, and had pried and measured and tested and wrangled, as though God was a natural curiosity, and they were intelligent scientific observers. Thus handled and controverted, the awful utterances were in danger of sinking into profane or simply nonsensical dogmas, the very mention of which was calculated to excite rather disgust at the profanity and litigiousness of believers, than a reverential sense of the Divine presence. Locke's feeling towards these dogmas was apparently compounded of traditional reverence for their sanctity, and disgust for the profane discord of which they had been the symbols. Others, however, were inclined to go further, to cast aside the reverence and retain the disgust. Sweep these obsolete formulæ out of the temple, and we should obtain a pure, simple, and universally intelligible creed. A suppressed rationalism showed itself in the Trinitarian controversy which raged towards the end of the century; but a more decided step was inviting, and the first man to take it openly was the strange adventurer, John, properly called Janus Junius, Toland.

11. From his earliest days Toland was a mere waif and stray, hanging loose upon society, retiring at intervals

into the profoundest recesses of Grub Street, emerging again by fits to scandalise the whole respectable world, and then once more sinking back into tenfold obscurity. His career is made pathetic by his incessant efforts to clutch at various supports, which always gave way as he grasped them. The illegitimate son, as it was said, probably out of mere malice, of an Irish priest, he became a convert to Protestantism at sixteen, and was supported by certain dissenters at Glasgow, Leyden, and Oxford. He repaid their generosity by acquiring a considerable amount of learning, and then by suddenly firing 'Christianity not Mysterious' in their faces. It was a luckless performance so far as his temporal interests were concerned. The Grand Jury of Middlesex presented it as a nuisance; the uproar which it excited followed him to Dublin; there for a time he braved the storm, and was foolish enough to maintain his opinions at 'coffee-houses and public tables;'[1] whereas infidelity, till a much later period, was, like hair-powder, an acknowledged perquisite of the aristocracy. Poor Toland fell into debt; it became dangerous to speak to him; and as South triumphantly declared, whilst wishing that English zeal were equally warm, 'the (Irish) parliament, to their immortal honour, sent him packing, and, without the help of a faggot, soon made the kingdom too hot to hold him.'

12. For the remaining twenty-five years of his life, poor Toland lived on his wits. We catch sight of him dimly flitting backwards and forwards between England and the Continent; at one time a bookseller's hack, at another living on the patronage of foreign princesses and English noblemen of freethinking tendencies, and sometimes it would seem a political spy. In a curious letter to Lord Oxford,[2] he expresses his contempt for that character, but at the same time his willingness to serve as 'private monitor' and purveyor of general information. Like his fellow-pensioner, De Foe, he defended himself by professions of public spirit, of which it is now impossible, as well as useless, to estimate the sincerity. From the court of Berlin he was driven, as his bio-

[1] See correspondence between Locke and Molyneux in 1697.

[2] See the letter in 'Collection of Pieces,' vol. ii. 220. See also Disraeli's 'Calamities of Authors' for a good account of Toland.

grapher provokingly tells us, by 'an incident too ludicrous to be mentioned.' The Electress Sophia and the Queen of Prussia —ladies, so his biographer assures us, 'who will ever be accounted the glory of the fair sex, for the sublimity of their genius,'[1] and other good qualities—amused themselves by listening to his philosophical dissertations. Leibnitz criticised him respectfully. At one time he was supported by the generosity of Lord Shaftesbury, and other friends at home and in Germany; and he finally died as the pensioner of Lord Molesworth, who had promised to secure him the necessaries of life. An epitaph, composed by himself, set forth his independence of spirit, his love of liberty, his wide knowledge of literature, and his acquaintance with more than ten languages. That was the last gleam of the vanity which Locke had noticed as a dangerous failing, and which, as his orthodox opponents proclaimed, had been the animating principle of his whole career. Had it been a little stronger, it might have been called a consciousness of great abilities. But though it prompted him to attempt, it did not support him in carrying out, any important design. The poor man did not know how to starve, and the numerous pamphlets which he published are mere scraps and tatters and unfinished fragments. Many are political. Some are experiments towards a proposed account of the Druids. Others bear more or less directly upon theological topics. An unlucky passage in the Life of Milton, referring to the Eikon Basilike, was construed into an indirect attack upon the authenticity of the Gospels, and led to a controversy upon the canon. The theological have a more or less pronounced tendency to rationalism. In one he tells the story of Hypatia, as an illustration of the wickedness of priests; in another he endeavours to prove that the pillar of cloud and fire was not a miraculous phenomenon, but a signal contained in an iron pot hoisted to the top of a pole.[2] 'Nazarenus' is a perplexed and rambling performance tending, it would seem, to support the doctrine, afterwards maintained by Priestley, that the early Jewish sects, the Nazarenes and Ebionites, who still observed the Mosaic law and believed in the humanity of Christ, were the genuine Christians. The inference would follow that

[1] See the Life in 'Collection of Pieces,' vol. i. lvi.

[2] 'Tetradymus,' p. 45.

the essence of Christianity consists in its moral precepts, and that the dogmatic and ceremonial superstructure of the later Church was a gross corruption of the original creed. Of the letters to Serena—intended for the Queen of Prussia—the first remarks upon the mode in which prejudices grow up without reason, though reasons are afterwards found for them; and the second traces the belief in immortality to the Egyptian funeral rites. He says, indeed, ostensibly that the doctrine is proved by revelation; but the natural inference from his arguments is to place the belief amongst the prejudices, which suggest, instead of following, proof. The particular explanation is, of course, absurd; but perhaps this attempt to account for the origin of beliefs otherwise than from reasoning shows a kind of nascent historic sense. Two other letters to 'a gentleman in Holland,' contain, under cover of an attack upon Spinoza, a defence of the doctrine, then held to be atheistical, that motion is essential to matter. In the scarcely serious pamphlet called 'Pantheisticon,' of which he only distributed a few privately printed copies, as a means of asking for presents, it was supposed that he gave a more open expression of his true sentiments. The book contains a rather eloquent statement of the doctrine of the eternal flux of creation as opposed to the popular belief in the catastrophe of the Deluge, and ends with a dialogue between the president and members of a philosophical society, who read passages from ancient philosophers. It is so printed and arranged as to suggest a parody of Christian liturgies, and amounts to a distinct avowal of Pantheism. There are other indications[1] that Toland more or less inclined to that creed, but the point may well remain doubtful.

13. These, and many other pamphlets, are of small interest, except as showing that Toland's mind was employed upon some questions, especially as to the historical origin of beliefs, which have since assumed greater importance; they are melancholy remnants, speaking of considerable talents

[1] Though Toland ostensibly attacked part of Spinoza's teaching in the 'Letters to Serena,' he mentions him with unusual respect. (See 'Tetradymus,' pp. 185–6.) To the tract on Socinianism is prefixed advice from a Pantheist to an orthodox friend; and a phrase in the epitaph written by himself looks like an avowal of Pantheism :—

'Ipse vero est æternum resurrecturus,
At idem futurus Tolandus nunquam.'

and wide reading, wasted by unpropitious circumstances, and, in short, the work of one whose ambition has outlived his efficient will. His first book, however, the 'Christianity not Mysterious,' more carefully and forcibly written than his later productions, excited a warmth of indignation which will certainly not be roused in any modern reader. It was the signal gun which brought on the general action, and, like most successful books, gave articulate expression to a widely diffused, but as yet latent, sentiment. Locke had argued that Christianity was reasonable. Toland added that there was no nonsense in Christianity. What was the difference between the two propositions? In the opinion of his antagonists, the main difference was that the very title of the book involves a subterfuge. Christianity must be taken to mean—not the historical creed of Christendom—but pure and undefiled religion; and as the accepted creed undeniably includes mysterious doctrines, his argument amounted to the assertion that the creed was so far false. Undoubtedly this was the tendency of his reasoning. How far he was conscious of the equivocation involved is a matter of little importance at the present time. It is fortunately not our duty to determine whether Toland and his like deserved damnation, but to discover in what way they affected thought. When we see how frequently other later writers, whilst sapping the base of orthodoxy, persuade themselves that they are merely removing superficial accretions, and especially when we remark how frequently they make use in the most entire good faith of an accurate reproduction of the old deist artifice, and try to keep the prestige of sacred names on their side, whilst altogether changing their application, we may easily be charitable to the deists. Yet I will add that, in my judgment, the deist writers did in fact mean a great deal more than they ventured to say. The shame, as one of their most candid opponents remarks,[1] ought to lie with those who made plain-speaking dangerous.

[1] Foster's 'Answer to Tindal,' preface. Toland, in a tract on the esoteric and exoteric philosophy of the ancients, gives a very sound canon; to the effect that, when a man maintains the common and authorised opinions, his sincerity may be doubtful; but that when he attacks those opinions, there is at least a presumption in favour of his sincerity ('Tetradymus,' p. 96).

14. Toland's argument starts with the customary remarks upon the impossibility of extracting any certain rule of faith from the conflicting authorities of popes, fathers, councils, and the whole wilderness of discordant churches. Reason, he says, must be the only foundation of all certitude.[1] By a more daring logic he proceeds to argue that assent should follow demonstration alone.[2] Starting from Locke's definition of knowledge as the perception of the agreement or disagreement of ideas,[3] he argues that ideas must be clear in order to admit of comparison. When we reason, we are like a carpenter who applies his foot-rule first alternately to two objects, and, in order to compare them, must necessarily be able to have a distinct view of each in turn. They must be alike tangible, visible, and accessible. Theologians had generally demanded an assent to propositions which, if not contradictory to reason, deal with matters in which the light of reason can be at best fluctuating and uncertain. Toland maintains that, in the absence of demonstration, we must hold our judgments in suspense, except, of course, in practical questions where we are forced to act upon probabilities.[4] There is, he says, no distinction between self-evident truths and those which require intermediate proofs. All demonstration becomes at length self-evident. 'I banish,' he declares in a new sense, 'all hypotheses from my philosophy.'[5] So long as a thing is only probable, our judgments must remain in suspense. But we can obtain absolute certainty even in regard to matters of fact not open to direct observation. When such truths as the existence of a foreign country are duly attested, by persons, that is, who cannot be 'justly suspected,' they become as 'certain and indubitable' as if we had seen them with our eyes.[6] Twilight disappears from the intellectual world; we are either in utter darkness or in the full daylight of mathematical demonstration.

15. How do these theories—which it would be superfluous to criticise at length—affect our theological beliefs? They would, in the first place, entitle us to disbelieve, or rather

[1] 'Christianity not Mysterious,' p. 6. [2] Ib. p. 22. [3] Ib. p. 12.
[4] Ib. p. 21. These words are not in the first edition. I quote from that of 1702.
[5] Ib. p. 15. [6] Ib. p. 17.

they show that it is impossible to believe anything which is 'contrary to reason,' or, in other words, anything which involves a contradiction. They entitle us again to demand strict proof of the historical statements of the Scriptures. It would be mere superstition to accept them without due attestation; or, as he says, it is a 'blamable credulity and a temerarious opinion,' to believe 'the divinity of the Scripture or the sense of any passage thereof without rational proofs and an evident consistency.'[1] A revealed truth must be distinctly proved, and must show the 'indisputable characters of divine wisdom and sound reason.'[2] Precedents are not wanting for our guidance in the holy records themselves. We are invited to admire the example of the Virgin, who, 'though of that sex which is least proof against flattery and superstition, did not implicitly believe that she should bear a son . . . until the angel gave a satisfactory answer to the strongest objection that could be raised.'[3] Toland proceeds to argue, in apparent good faith, that Christianity will satisfy this rigorous test; nor, though he refrains from expressly identifying Christianity with the body of doctrines generally known under that name, is there anything in this argument necessarily incompatible with orthodoxy. Perhaps, however, it was pardonable in divines to look with a certain distrust upon a theory which contemplated the propriety of occasionally cross-examining an archangel.

16. The difficulties thicken as Toland ventures into the delicate enquiry about the Christian mysteries, which was the main design of his book. He maintains that, as nothing is contrary to reason, so there is nothing 'above reason' in the Gospel. We are required to believe nothing that is inconceivable as well as nothing that is contradictory. He argues at considerable length, and with much show of learning, that the word mystery, as used both in the writings of classical authors and in the Scriptures, does not signify a proposition inconceivable to our minds, but simply a proposition known to us by revelation alone.[4] The veil once with-

[1] 'Christianity not Mysterious,' p. 37. [2] Ib. p. 42. [3] Ib. p. 4.

[4] Ch. iii. especially p. 108. The same doctrine, as Mr. Pattison reminds us, was maintained by Archbishop Whately. It is also explicitly stated by Sherlock, Works, i. 83.

drawn, the mystery may, and indeed must be, as simple as any other truth, and a mysterious doctrine is merely one which for some reason or other has been concealed from certain classes of mankind. In this sense the existence of America, for example, would be a mystery until Columbus had discovered it. Was there not a danger that mysteries understood in the other sense of doctrines essentially incomprehensible by our understandings would be dissipated when brought under the broad glare of reason? If the hidden nature of the Deity be inscrutable by our feeble organs, under the ordinary light of day, and if, as Toland seems to maintain, there is no twilight, and no supernatural illumination addressed to any faculty but the reason, must not the whole subject be buried in impenetrable night? All faith now in the world, he tells us, is 'entirely built upon ratiocination.'[1] Faith in the New Testament means 'persuasion built upon substantial reasons.'[2] Faith, then, must deal with doctrines which can be intelligibly construed by our minds. Propositions about things inconceivable would, in plain words, be simply nonsense. 'Could that person,' he asks, 'justly value himself upon his knowledge who, having infallible assurance that something called a Blictri had a being in nature, in the meantime knew not what this Blictri was?'[3] The answer is so far clear; and indeed it did not require an elaborate logical apparatus to prove to us that mere gibberish cannot be an article of reasonable faith, and that there would be no intelligible meaning in requiring a man to believe, under the penalty of damnation, that a hocus-pocus is an Abracadabra.[4] The real question remains, what are the propositions which are thus inaccessible? Are we at liberty, for example, to substitute Trinity or the Deity or the Real Presence for Blictri? It was obviously essential to Toland's argument that he should in some way define the powers of the human understanding, and point out where daylight ends and tenfold night begins. The nearest approach to a definite answer is given in a chapter designed to prove that a thing is not a mystery, 'because we have not an adequate idea of all its properties, nor any at all of its essence.' He says, in Locke's phraseology, that we may know the 'nominal' but not the

[1] 'Christianity not Mysterious,' p. 127.
[2] Ib. p. 132.
[3] Ib. p. 128.
[4] Ib. p. 134.

'real essences' of things. Our knowledge, that is, is purely relative, and hence it follows that, in one sense, every object is mysterious, and, in another, no object. If a thing is to be called a mystery because we do not know its real essence, then a pebble or a 'spire of grass'[1] is a profound mystery. This is a sense which would destroy all knowledge. But in the other sense, according to Toland, neither the soul nor God himself is a mystery. We cannot form any idea of the ultimate essence of either, but we know the properties of the soul as clearly as we know the properties of the body, and 'as for God, we comprehend nothing better than his attributes.'[2] Religious doctrines, it would therefore appear, are mysterious in the sense, and only in the sense, in which scientific propositions are mysterious; or, as he prefers to say, they are not mysterious at all. We can make intelligible propositions about God and the soul, as well as about the sun or the human body, and in each case the source of our knowledge is the same, his final analysis of its origin, as indeed the whole of his philosophy, being substantially derived from his master, Locke.

17. The explanation leaves us at a loss. What doctrines may not be accepted under the saving clause? If the Divine Being be no more a mystery than a blade of grass, scholastic theology is a possible science. The most obvious interpretation of Toland's words would admit of pure Deism, but condemn speculations as to the nature of the Deity. One passage, in fact, seems to be directed against the doctrine of the Trinity,[3] though Toland declared in a subsequent Apology that he was thinking only of such extravagant reasoners as Eutyches.[4]

The evasion seems to be palpable; for Toland's arguments are directed not against particular conclusions, but against the possibility of reaching any conclusions. They, therefore, condemn Athanasius just as distinctly as Arius or Eutyches. Toland, however, avoids any detailed statement, promising to give further details in a second volume, which never appeared. The only doctrine which he distinctly attacks, as falling under his canon, is that of Transubstantiation. In the tract called 'Vindicius Liberius,' written on occasion of an attack upon him in Convocation, Toland apologised for

[1] 'Christianity not Mysterious,' p. 79.
[2] Ib. p. 86.
[3] Ib. p. 27.
[4] 'Apology,' p. 33.

the 'undigested notions'[1] of twenty-five, and besides declaring his belief in God and a future world, added that he believed in Christianity, and in particular that he willingly and heartily conformed to the doctrine and worship of the Church of England.[2]

18. It is difficult to believe in his complete sincerity; but it is true enough that his notions were undigested, and that the argument, though not wanting in vigour, was not carried to a systematic conclusion. Like many other men of far greater power, he had an easy task so long as he was only proving that two and two made four; but became perplexed so soon as it was a question of applying his method to the solution of difficult problems. The proposed excision of mystery from Christianity reduced itself to an excision of mere jargon, without any distinct decision as to what was and what was not jargon. The conclusion to which his arguments seem to point would have been contrary to his own belief. For, in truth, there is one way, and only one way, in which mystery may be expelled from religion, and that is by expelling theology. A religion without mystery is a religion without God. Toland, as we have seen, maintained that our knowledge of God was as intimate as our knowledge of a spire of grass. He had asked the really significant question, but he had not the metaphysical acuteness necessary for giving a plausible answer; nor were his contemporaries prepared to pursue the investigation. Toland is a follower of Locke, and in the path which leads to the purely sceptical solution of Hume. And yet he is ready to accept the dying metaphysical system, and to discuss the attributes of God with Leibnitz or Clarke. He does not see that his arguments strike at the root of his assumptions. A little more prudence was considered desirable both by Toland and his followers, instead of an entire renunciation of a fundamentally hopeless task. Like most of the later deists, he was convinced that reason was not only sufficient for our guidance, but sufficient to do all that theology had professed to do. The whole school believed firmly in its own omniscience. Like the Egyptian magicians, they did not deny the reality of their rival's miracles, but asserted that they could produce equal

[1] 'Vindicius Liberius,' p. 105. [2] Ib. p. 106.

wonders. They would pare away some of the bolder extravagances into which divines had been betrayed; but they were ready to erect a new scholasticism, convinced that the main doctrines would be all the firmer when they had been purified of a few irrelevant freaks of fancy. For this reason, the path opened by Toland remained comparatively untrodden. No critical acid could be devised which would remove mystery without biting into the substance of natural religion. The main attempt to rationalise Christianity was made, as we shall presently see, by a different method. The impulse given by Toland tended indirectly to encourage the later writers in their attempted construction of a religious theory which should treat of the Divine nature, and yet be as simple as the first book of Euclid; but its immediate result was a rather purposeless ebullition of metaphysical controversy.

19. Toland's book set Locke and Stillingfleet by the ears, and some very hard hitting ensued between the Bishop and the philosopher, at which we may fancy Toland chuckling with all the vanity of gratified mischief. Stillingfleet was joining in the Trinitarian controversy, which marked the close of the century, and rightly felt that Unitarianism was a blight on the true faith, due to the presence in the intellectual atmosphere of incipient scepticism. It was an attempt to accommodate the dogma of the Trinity to a pure monotheism. Toland was suspected of making Unitarianism a step to Deism; and Toland sheltered himself under Locke's authority. The Bishop, as Locke put it, found that Toland's theories joined Unitarianism on one side, and the doctrines of the 'Essay' on another; and who, he asks, 'can deny that, so ranged in a row, your Lordship may please yourself so that we may seem but one object, and so one shot be aimed at us altogether?'[1] The bishop's instincts were better than his reasoning powers. Locke, the Unitarians, Toland, form a genuine series, in which Christianity is being gradually transmuted by larger infusions of rationalism. But many men can detect a rogue who cannot give proofs for their suspicion; and writers who seem to be incapable of forming a coherent syllogism, are endowed with a dumb faculty of recognising the family likeness between different systems of thought.

[1] Locke's Works, iii. 108.

Stillingfleet felt the presence of the accursed thing, but failed signally in his attempt to make it evident to others. So far as Toland was concerned, the Bishop's efforts were directed to saddling Locke with the inferences which Toland had drawn from Locke's account of the reasoning process. Locke explained at great length that, although reasoning consisted in perceiving the agreement or disagreement of ideas, and although our reasoning would be made clearer by the possession of clear ideas, he never asserted or thought that it was impossible to obtain certainty about obscure ideas.[1] For example, he held it to be demonstrable that there was some such thing as substance, though we could have no distinct idea of what substance was. The argument extended over a great many other topics; and the Bishop endeavoured, unskilfully enough, to bring the old methods of scholasticism to overwhelm Locke's new philosophy. The Bishop answered the philosopher's defence, and the philosopher replied to the Bishop's answer; and yet another answer to the reply and reply to the answer to the reply appeared before the controversy was ended. Each of the antagonists thought it necessary, after the old-fashioned method, to give a distinct answer to each paragraph, and almost to each sentence in each paragraph, of the argument directed against him. It is unnecessary to attempt to follow the wearisome dispute, though certain fragments have their interest as illustrating Locke's philosophical principles, because it is not only tedious and obscure, but has no direct bearing on the controversy with which we are now concerned. The dispute, which started from Deism, lost itself in the morasses of metaphysics.

20. Toland's book produced various replies. John Norris, better known as the author of the 'Ideal World,' defended the distinction between things 'above' and things 'contrary' to reason in his 'Account of Reason and Truth.' The obvious truth that we can believe on evidence, propositions which we can neither demonstrate nor fully understand, is set forth with a cumbrous apparatus of scholastic logic and Malebranchian metaphysics; though he scarcely comes near enough to the real questions at issue to show that the distinction as applied to the Christian mysteries does not correspond

[1] Locke's Works, iii. 42, and elsewhere.

to a distinction between the meaningless and the contradictory. Another assault is more remarkable. Peter Browne, then a Fellow of Trinity College, Dublin, attacked him in the genuine theological spirit, and is said to have acknowledged a certain amount of gratitude to his victim[1] as having been the indirect means of his elevation to the bishopric of Cork. Browne called Toland a fool in great variety of phrase; he believed, moreover, in a secret cabal of Socinians and infidels and atheists, with emissaries in all parts of the world, supported by contribution. 'There could be little doubt,' he adds, 'that their design is at length to show us that all dominion, as well as religion, is founded in reason'[2]—the consequences of which would be something dreadful. Toland's prospects in the next world were of the most discouraging character; and he thoroughly deserved the strongest measures in this. Toleration was not for 'blasphemy and profaneness,' and Browne would deliver this sinner 'into the hands of the magistrate, not moved by any heat of passion, but by such a zeal as becomes every Christian to have for his profession.'[3] The fire would burn equally well, whether lighted by zeal or passion. Browne's argument, when not interrupted by these outbursts of controversial wrath, is a curious anticipation of some more recent speculations. Its author long afterwards expanded it into two books, the 'Procedure, Extent, and Limits of Human Understanding,' and 'Things Supernatural and Divine conceived by Analogy with things Natural and Human,' which appeared in 1728 and 1733 respectively. The doctrine maintained in these writings is substantially the same, and Browne seems to think that it will gain strength by incessant repetition. It illustrates the great difficulty which pressed upon contemporary theologians. What attitude should be assumed in regard to the intrusive faculty of the reason? Admit it to prove the articles of the faith, and there was a danger lest the ally should become a master, and substitute mere natural religion for the characteristic tenets of Christian

[1] Chalmers, 'Biog. Dictionary,' Art. 'Browne;' but it seems more likely that Toland claimed, than that Browne acknowledged, this influence. See Toland's 'Pieces,' 'Life,' p. xx.

[2] Browne's 'Answer' to Toland, p. 169. [3] Ib. p. 142.

theology. But deny its competence altogether, and the greater danger appeared of a scepticism more thoroughgoing than Toland's. Doctrines which could not be construed to the human intelligence, would appear to be mere jargon about a 'Blictri.' A man cannot really believe anything about what is avowedly inconceivable. How was the intellect to be represented as endowed with a receptive faculty, whilst entirely devoid of any critical faculty, in regard to the dogmas proposed for its acceptance?

21. Browne took up the dangerous position of humiliating the intellect to the utmost possible extent. He accepted the dogma 'Nihil in intellectu quod non prius in sensu' to the fullest extent,[1] and declared that the vital error of metaphysicians was the belief that the reason had any materials besides those supplied by the senses. And yet, whilst condemning Locke for putting reflection beside sensation as a source of knowledge, he charged Locke with a tendency to Atheism.[2] The argument by which he reached this position strongly resembles that maintained by the late Dean Mansel, in his 'Bampton Lectures.' It may be shortly described as an attempt to out-infidel the infidel. He claimed explicitly that the orthodox were 'as vigorous defenders of the use of reason in religion as he (Toland) could be;'[3] and asserted that our whole Christian faith is grounded on the strictest ratiocination.[4] Reason, in fact, provides us with a logical instrument capable of cutting away the ground from under the infidel's feet. It shows that we are not only ignorant of God as he is in himself, which in a sense may be said equally of Toland's 'spire of grass,' but that his attributes and mode of operation are totally inconceivable by human faculties. King, Archbishop of Dublin, argued, in a sermon on Predestination, preached in 1709, that we could ascribe wisdom and foreknowledge to God only 'by way of resemblance and analogy;'[5] and said that to reason upon his attributes, and to 'extend the parallel further than that very instance which the resemblance was designed to teach us,'[6] was to fall into such errors as would beset a man who inferred

[1] 'Procedure,' &c., p. 55.
[2] 'Analogy,' p. 127, &c.
[3] 'Answer to Toland,' p. 120.
[4] Ib. p. 126.
[5] King's Sermon (edition by Whately in 1821), p. 8.
[6] Ib. p. 19.

from the resemblance between a map and a country that the country was really made of paper.[1] A more popular illustration was given by Synge, Archbishop of Tuam, who answered Toland, in an appendix to a very popular little book, called 'A Gentleman's Religion.' Human knowledge of divine things, according to him, was like a blind man's knowledge of light and colour.[2] Browne works out the same illustration at great length,[3] though he holds it to give an inadequate notion of the extent of our knowledge.[4] In his two later books he adopts and expands King's argument.

22. He begins by insisting upon the narrow limits of our powers. It would be impossible for a modern positivist to use stronger language as to the utter incapacity of our minds to judge of the Divine nature. He exhausts himself in the attempt to convey any adequate measure of the depths of our ignorance. 'We can,' he declares, 'have no ideas or conceptions at all, either in whole or in part, distinct or confused, clear or obscure, determinate or indeterminate,'[5] of God's real nature and attributes. His veracity, justice, and mercy, differ not merely in degree, but in kind, from the qualities which go by the same names amongst men. Nay, 'we are as little able to conceive the divine manner of externally exerting the intrinsic moral perfections in the Divinity as to conceive the real internal perfections from which they proceed.'[6] He adds that, if his opponents can mention any one instance in which the divine goodness operates like that of man, it shall decide the controversy. 'The true nature and manner of all the divine operations of goodness is utterly incomprehensible.'[7] This doctrine was scarcely likely to commend itself to ordinary theologians, who thought that a demonstration that human beings must of necessity be, in the modern phrase, Agnostics, was an awkward foundation for the doctrine of the Trinity. Berkeley, noticing King's sermon in the 'Minute Philosopher,' puts the argument into the mouth of one of his infidels. 'The belief of a God,' says one of them, 'may be attended with no great ill-consequences. This, I know, was the opinion of our great

[1] King's Sermon, p. 21.
[2] 'A Gentleman's Religion,' p. 216, &c.
[3] 'Analogy,' pp. 20, 216.
[4] Ib. p. 411.
[5] Ib. p. 237.
[6] Ib. p. 269.
[7] Ib. p. 333.

Diagoras, who told me he would never have been at the pains to find out a demonstration that there was no God, if the received notion of a God had been the same with that of some fathers and schoolmen;'[1] and he proceeds to point out that 'the belief that there is an unknown subject of attributes equally unknown, is a very innocent doctrine, which the acute Diagoras well saw, and was, therefore, wonderfully delighted with this system.' Browne, now a bishop, was, of course, furious at this attack from a brother bishop, and retorted the accusation of Atheism. As, he said, the human and divine attributes are essentially different, all the ordinary arguments in which their identity is implicitly assumed are necessarily worthless. It is curious to see how the advocates of an opinion are distracted between the desire to retain every argument, good or bad, that seems to make in its favour, and the jealousy with which they regard all rival theories. The problem as to whether it is better that the patient should die than that he should be cured by a quack doctor is often very perplexing. In this case, the conflict between the rival theologians was too direct to admit of a coalition; and cynical infidels had, therefore, the amusement—not for the first or the last time—of seeing two pillars of orthodoxy proclaiming, with abundant emphasis, that the rival structure was a mere heap of crumbling rubbish, totally unable to support the weight placed upon it. Hume probably took some hints from this controversy in writings to be hereafter noticed.

23. Browne's method of extracting light from darkness was simple enough. King had said that knowledge, goodness, and so forth, when applied to God, were used metaphorically. Browne thought that this language was a little unguarded; but the difficulty was entirely surmounted if for 'metaphorical' was substituted 'analogical.' The difference between the two words is that a metaphor implies no real likeness, whereas an analogy does imply some such likeness between the two things compared. Thus, though words failed him to express the difference between the meaning of 'good' as applied to man and as applied to God, goodness in the one case might be considered as in some sense or other a faint reflection of goodness in the other. Thanks to this

[1] Dial. iv. §§ 16, 17.

artifice, our ignorance of the divine nature was reconcilable with the assertion that 'nothing is more clear and evident to our understanding than the doctrines themselves concerning mysteries.'[1] The primitive believers were content with believing that Christ was the Son of God in the ordinary sense of the words; and it would be well if we could preserve that simple faith in the present day.[2] Unfortunately restless and inquisitive infidels have insisted upon stirring up difficulties, to meet which 'the doctrine of the divine analogy has now become absolutely necessary,' and is likely to continue as long as the 'present strain of infidelity lasts,' which will not improbably be till 'the latest posterity.'[3] Analogy enables us to make a belief in the fatherhood of the first person of the Trinity, taking the word fatherhood in its ordinary sense, representative of a belief about ineffable mysteries, in which every term represents a something utterly inconceivable to the human intellect. Browne has a whole apparatus of theory to reconcile the apparent difficulties of this doctrine; and to show that knowledge by analogy is, if anything, clearer and more satisfactory than any other kind of knowledge. The conceivable and inconceivable are in some way blended, like body and spirit, and the 'gross earthly proposition is sanctified' by the higher meaning which it bears with it.[4] By a theological trick of legerdemain, he even persuades himself that, though God's knowledge is not, in any intelligible sense, knowledge at all, it is yet knowledge in an infinitely higher sense than human knowledge. But into these metaphysical enigmas, now buried in tenfold night, it is unnecessary to penetrate further, or to endeavour to reconcile Browne's assault upon all *a priori* demonstrations of God's existence and character with his own use of the same arguments in a slightly different dress.

24. Berkeley touched him to the quick by a simple remark in his own style, from which he struggles in vain to extricate himself. Wise and good, says the Christian advocate, in the 'Minute Philosopher,' must be understood in the same sense of God as of man: 'Otherwise it is evident that every syllogism brought to prove those attributes, or (which is the same

[1] 'Analogy,' p. 188.
[2] 'Procedure,' p. 284, &c.
[3] 'Procedure,' p. 288.
[4] 'Analogy,' p. 238.

thing) to prove the being of a God, will be found to consist of four terms, and consequently can conclude nothing.'[1] Browne attempts to escape this obvious dilemma; but it is plain enough that the effort is fruitless. None of his nostrums will save him. The phrase about analogy, like so many other metaphysical phrases, is convenient enough for throwing dust in the eyes of the simple persons who are awed by the primary assumption of many metaphysicians that the invention of a new phraseology is equivalent to the discovery of a new set of truths. But all Browne's ingenious contortions were as much thrown away as the contortions of abler men. No verbal machinery can ever be constructed for manufacturing sound belief out of pure negation. From the premiss that we do not and cannot form any conceptions of God, the commonplace and the acute thinker will alike draw the inference that theology lies beyond the limits within which the human intellect can work effectively.

25. A complete investigation of the questions raised by Toland's treatise would thus have involved a determination of the true bounds of human speculation. And, if the logical were also the historical order of the development, such an enquiry should have preceded the attempt to construct a philosophical theology. Before offering to lead us through the dimmest regions of thought, our guides should provide themselves with some credentials of their capacity. Have they, or has any human being, the power of soaring into the thin air of ontological speculation, or are we chained to the earth by the mortality of our nature, and liable only to fail the more ignominiously in proportion to the audacity of the attempt? Before you would fly, it is worth while asking whether you have wings. Toland's question, however, failed to impress this necessity upon his opponents. He had caught but a partial glimpse of a problem which he was incompetent to solve; and the disputants were rapidly involved in a bewildering vortex of metaphysical disputation, where their brains became so giddy that they could not judge the direction of their blows. The controversy became a mere offshoot from the main currents of speculation, which led to conclusions of a very different nature to those contemplated by Toland.

[1] 'Diał.' iv. 22.

The judicious precaution of determining beforehand the limits of your capacity is one which can be seldom or never adopted. Hard experience is here, as elsewhere, the only teacher, and bruises and broken limbs the only satisfactory proofs that flying is not a human art. Philosophers are still labouring, like the cunning artificer in 'Rasselas,' to patch up some kind of artificial apparatus which might enable them to pass the barriers hitherto insurmountable by the human intellect. The most distinguished manufacturer of such logical flying-machines in England was a writer whose posthumous fame probably bears a smaller ratio to his fame amongst his contemporaries than is the case with any other author of the time.

## *III. CLARKE AND WOLLASTON.*

26. Samuel Clarke was a man of sufficient intellectual vigour to justify a very high reputation, and his faults were those which are less obvious to the eyes of contemporaries than of posterity. He was deficient in originality and acuteness. He had perspicuity enough to avoid some of the extravagances of the school to which he belonged, but not enough to detect its fundamental fallacies. His contemporaries might therefore regard him as a bold, yet wary, logician; to us he appears to be a second-rate advocate of opinions interesting only in the mouths of the greater men who were their first and ablest advocates. He somewhat resembles a more recent Cambridge philosopher, Dr. Whewell, and stands to Leibnitz in the same sort of relation which Whewell occupied to modern German philosophers. In softening the foreign doctrines to suit English tastes, he succeeds in enervating them without making them substantially more reasonable. Clarke was the great English representative of the *a priori* method of constructing a system of theology. He was sufficiently tainted by rationalism to fall into certain errors in regard to the doctrine of the Trinity; and his incipient heterodoxy has caused later theologians to look upon him with suspicion, and has helped to reduce his name to a humble position in the list of eminent defenders of the faith. A more special characteristic resulted from his being regarded by himself and others as a theological

lieutenant of Newton. In defence of that great name he plunged into a remarkable controversy with Leibnitz, from which he was held to have emerged with honour. The whole tone of his writings is coloured by the same influence. His ambition apparently was to compose a work which should be to Christianity what the 'Principia' was to astronomy. More than any English writer he clothes his arguments with that apparatus of quasi-mathematical phraseology which was common to most of the followers of Descartes.

27. The two books of Clarke's with which we are at present concerned were originally delivered as Boyle lectures in the years 1704 and 1705. Together, according to the design of the writer, they would form a symmetrical edifice of pure theology, resting on the immovable basis of intuitive truths, cemented and dovetailed together by irrefragable demonstration, and essentially independent of any external revelation, although admitting, if not rigorously requiring, some such supernatural crowning of the work. Like the Tower of Babel, it was intended to reach heaven from the earth, in defiance of any future deluge of infidelity. Clarke never doubted that, by the help of a series of axioms, propositions, and corollaries, a safe foundation might be laid above that 'Serbonian bog,' in which whole armies of divines and philosophers have been lost. Divines looked askance upon labours which, however judiciously devised, threatened to supersede the necessity for a supernatural architect; and sceptics might raise doubts as to the validity of the processes involved. Clarke betrays no hesitation, and he represents in its greatest completeness one of the characteristic impulses of the time. The first set of lectures in which he demonstrates the existence and attributes of the Supreme Being are a slight modification of the arguments prevalent in the schools of Descartes, Leibnitz, and Spinoza. Like those great men, he makes unsparing use of the ordinary metaphysical assumption which, in its various forms, comes to this—that our conceptions are necessarily the measure of objective existence; and by the Leibnitzian argument of the sufficient cause, converts our ignorance into a positive ground of knowledge. Hobbes and Spinoza are named as adversaries on the title-page; but he might be more accurately described as following the argu-

ment of Spinoza up to the point where its logic becomes irreconcilable with the ordinary theism.

28. A chain of twelve propositions is supposed to demonstrate the existence, the omnipresence, the omnipotence, the omniscience, and the infinite wisdom and beneficence of the Creator as plainly as Euclid demonstrates the equality of the angles at the base of an isosceles triangle. The supposed demonstration is that cosmological or ontological proof—for the two run into each other—which Hume's philosophy would upset and which Kant more systematically attacked in the 'Critique of the Pure Reason.' It is a contradiction in terms to suppose that there can have been an infinite chain of dependent beings. There must, therefore, have been an eternal and self-existent Being, whose non-existence would imply a contradiction—an argument which Clarke labours to distinguish from the well-known argument of Descartes.[1] The material universe cannot be this necessary Being, as Spinoza (so Clarke understands him) maintained,[2] for we can suppose matter to be altered or destroyed without contradiction. There is, then, a 'self-existent' Being, the cause of all other existence, whose essence, indeed, is absolutely inconceivable, but many of whose attributes are demonstrable.[3] Here Clarke agrees with Toland, though he appears to reckon Toland,[4] as well as Spinoza, amongst the atheists. This Being must be eternal, infinite, and omnipresent, because what is necessary in one place or time must be necessary in another. He must be one, because if there were two beings, either could be supposed to exist without the other. He must be intelligent, because the cause must be more perfect than the effect, and intelligence is a distinct quality, not compounded out of mere figure and motion. He must be a free agent, because freedom is implied in intelligence, and because, if all things were necessary, it would imply a contradiction for anything to be different from what it is; as, for example, for a horse to have six legs.[5] He must be omnipotent; but here Clarke comes upon the danger which assails all such speculations. He has, in short, to limit the infinite, lest the universe should be swallowed up in Deity.

29. Spinoza had revealed once for all the inevitable ten-

[1] Clarke's Works, ii. 529–30. [2] Ib. p. 533. [3] Ib. pp. 537–539.
[4] Ib. p. 531. The reference is to Toland's Letters upon Spinoza. [5] Ib. p. 551.

dency of this mode of thought, and Clarke does his best to overwhelm that formidable antagonist, admitting that here lies, in great measure, the 'principal difference between us and the atheists.'[1] In the effort, Clarke really sacrifices the whole efficacy of his theory. Everything in it depends on the unbroken series of causation, leading us back to a first cause, though, in accepting a first term to that series, he is assuming the truth of one branch of the inevitable controversy. The logical expedient, which Clarke adopts, is the ordinary one. Liberty is defined by him to be a power of 'self-motion.' He has demonstrated to his own satisfaction that this power exists in the Deity. He declares that it is a power which can be communicated to the creature, because the only powers not capable of such communication are those 'which imply self-existence and absolute independency.'[2] For the fact that it actually has been communicated, he appeals, as usual, to our consciousness. Thus, in some sense, every free agent is, in fact, a first cause on a small scale; for it is significant that Clarke avowedly appeals, in proving the possibility of such a power in the creature, to the same arguments which have proved its existence in the case of the Creator.[3] Thus the circuit is broken, and the inferior agents become independent sources of power, instead of mere channels for transmitting force from the prime source of all power. And this step once taken, it is easy to explain the origin of evil (in a short paragraph) and to demonstrate the existence of supreme goodness, wisdom, and justice in the Deity.

30. These arguments, though attacked by Hume and Kant, survive to the present day, and satisfy many acute reasoners. The form, indeed, has changed more than the substance. The same reasons have been adduced ever since men felt that theology required some foundation in reason; and the same inevitable difficulty recurs to be met by the same expedients. The attempt to weld the arguments into an indissoluble chain of logic is seldom, indeed, repeated with the same frankness and the same indifference to those warnings against dealing with the Infinite and the Eternal which have in our days paralysed the framers of theological systems. Leaving this insoluble dispute, I proceed to the second trea-

[1] Clarke's Works, ii. p. 554. [2] Ib. p. 558. [3] Ib. p. 560.

tise, which has a closer connection with the deist controversy. From the chain of propositions just described is to be suspended another, demonstrating with equal cogency the truth of revealed religion. The chain in this case consists of fifteen links. Their solidity and coherence have been so amply tested that they will be sufficient to drag the most inveterate infidel that ever raised a superfluous cavil at the chariot wheels of this invincible master of logic. The argument deserves notice as illustrating in the clearest manner the great perplexity of the rationalising divines. How was a religion, resting upon abstract demonstration, to be fused with a religion resting upon, or at least involving, a certain series of historical beliefs? The records of a particular tribe, or family of nations, may be an insufficient basis for a religion which is to sum up the experience of the whole human race; but it is still more difficult to effect any plausible combination when the historical evidence of the creed is supposed to rest on the proof of a few miracles occurring within narrow limits of time and space, and the internal evidence upon truths universal and absolute as those of geometry. The two elements jar upon our minds as though a statement that London was at a certain distance from Paris formed part of a chain of demonstration in a treatise of pure mathematics. Clarke's oscillation, as he stands with one foot planted on absolute *a priori* truths, and the other on a fragment of concrete evidence, is natural and curiously characteristic of the whole contemporary theology.

31. He starts by insisting upon the clearness, immutability, and universality of the law of nature. Morality, like mathematics, is founded upon 'the eternal and necessary differences of things.' To deny the primary duties to be binding is as absurd as to assert that 'a whole is not equal to its parts, or that a square is not double to a triangle of equal base and height.'[1] A man who refuses to obey the law of doing to his neighbour as he would that his neighbour should do to him, is as unreasonable as he that 'should affirm one number or quantity to be equal to another, and yet that other at the same time not equal to the first.'[2] A rational being can no more forbear giving his assent to the eternal rule of right

[1] Clarke's Works, ii. 609. [2] Ib. p. 613.

and equity, than 'one who is instructed in mathematics can forbear giving his assent to every geometrical demonstration of which he understands the terms.'[1] Clarke does not shrink from maintaining that moral obligation is antecedent even to the consideration of its being the rule of God. As mathematical operations give a constant solution of certain problems, 'so in moral matters there are certain necessary and unalterable respects or relations of things which have not their origin from arbitrary and positive institutions, but are of eternal necessity in their own nature.'[2] Things are not holy and good because commanded by God, but are commanded by God because holy and good. The perfections of the Divine nature make it necessary for him to observe the law, and the law, and not barely the infinite power of the Creator, is 'the true foundation and the measure of his dominion over his creatures.' The question as to which of two necessarily coincident powers is logically antecedent, may seem to modern ears to be somewhat frivolous, and the attempt to answer it to border upon presumption. Neither is it necessary to consider how far the apparent meaning of such statements is neutralised by such an assertion as this: 'The nature, indeed, and relations, the proportions and disproportions, the fitnesses and unfitnesses of things are eternal, and in themselves absolutely unalterable; but this is only upon supposition that the things exist, and that they exist in such a manner as they at present do. Now that things exist in such manner as they do, or that they exist at all, depends entirely upon the arbitrary will and pleasure of God.'[3]

32. Without puzzling ourselves in this scholastic labyrinth, it is enough to remark that Nature, the true metaphysical deity of Clarke and his school, is sometimes identified with God, and sometimes appears to be in some sense a common superior of man and his Creator. The law of nature thus becomes a code of absolutely true and unalterable propositions, strictly analogous to those of pure mathematics. The old puzzle as to whether God could make two straight lines enclose a space recurs in regard to the moral law. The human being is regarded as a colourless unit, whose duty may be determined by proper diagrams or the application of established formulæ, like

[1] Clarke's Works, ii. 614. [2] Ib. p. 626. [3] Ib. p. 640.

the relation between numbers or geometrical magnitudes. And thus by a different path from Locke's we reach the perplexing problem: Why is an inspired system of morality more needed than an inspired system of mathematics? If St. Paul is merely the Newton of morality, why should not Plato or Aristotle have done the work as well as the Apostle? The Greeks could discover that a square was twice the area of a triangle on the same base and altitude; why could they not discover with equal certainty that a man was bound to do to his neighbour as he would wish his neighbour to do unto him? Reason is apparently exalted to such a pitch that revelation becomes superfluous. How is it to be shown that their spheres are not coterminous, and that an organ is required in morality which is not wanted in mathematics?

33. One answer is obvious. Though revelation was scarcely required to reveal a code of morality, it was perhaps necessary that it should promulgate the sanctions of the code. Clarke, though an intuitive moralist, is by no means prepared to dispense with hell. Though virtue is worthy to be chosen for its own sake, and though, but for the corruption of the world, it would bring happiness to the individual as well as to mankind at large, yet as matters actually stand, we are forced to regard it rather as a means than an end. But for the prospect of future reward, a man who died in a good cause would be no happier than the man who died in pursuit of any frivolous ambition.[1] Are we, then, to suppose that the purpose of revelation was to set before men those surpassing rewards, and those awful penalties, without which virtue would be an empty dream, and which the dim light of reason was unable to discover? That, as we have seen, was Locke's position, and the favourite one of contemporary divines. Locke had admitted, with his usual candour, that the immortality of the soul was not demonstrable by reason, and had asserted that few Christians rested their belief in immortality upon any other ground than revelation.[2] Such modest tactics were little to the taste of the bold logician who considered human reason amply qualified to grapple with the mysteries of the Divine nature. Stating the usual argument from the justice of providence, which Locke notices with some hesitation, Clarke declares

[1] Clarke's Works, ii. 643 and 646.

[2] Locke's Works, iii. 477.

that 'it seems to amount even to a demonstration.'[1] Four other 'very good and strong arguments' are adduced to support this powerful bulwark of truth. If he stops from claiming a mathematical fulness of proof, his reluctance is obviously due to the desire not to cut away all ground for revelation. In the sphere of practice, indeed, there is still plenty of room for supernatural interference. Potentially the arguments for immortality were irrefragable; but, as a matter of fact, men 'could not forbear doubting' a future state of retribution, in spite of 'the strongest arguments of reason.'[2] The carelessness, prejudice, and absorption in worldly business of mankind, and still more their vice and debauchery, have hindered their belief. Perhaps the facts alleged to explain the failure of the theory were felt to throw some doubt upon the theory itself. If the dogma of a future life is as demonstrable as a sum in arithmetic, men might neglect, but could hardly disbelieve it. Clarke indeed has little trouble in showing from history how feeble a guide the intellect has been to these essential truths; and yet it is rather an awkward conception of revelation that God sent messengers into the world to proclaim, on supernatural and infallible authority, that two and two make four. Surely a result more worthy of Divine interference should be discovered!

34. Besides repeating the familiar arguments already used by Locke, as to the moral value of a revelation, Clarke introduces a distinction, often used by the divines of his time. There are certain things which God may do if he pleases, but which he is not bound to do. They are, so to speak, acts of supererogation; they are done, if done at all, from excess of goodness; they are not set down in the bond; and though we must be grateful for them when done, we cannot complain if they are left undone. Here, then, is left a wide range within which positive legislation is admissible. Though reason may obtain something like demonstrative knowledge of the fundamental laws and constitution of the universe, there is a category of divine acts, wherein the constitution leaves freedom of action to the sovereign, and wherein, accordingly, nothing but his own explicit assertion can inform us of the course which he has adopted. In such problems reason may raise a strong

[1] Clarke's Works, ii. 652. [2] Ib. p. 667.

presumption, but requires to be checked, corroborated, or perhaps supplemented, by direct revelation. Thus, for example, philosophers might anticipate that God would accept repentance instead of obedience. But the presumption falls short of demonstration. 'For it cannot positively be proved from any of God's attributes, that he is absolutely obliged to pardon all creatures all their sins at all times' (observe the caution of the statement), 'barely and immediately upon their repenting.'[1] Nature makes us anxious to appease the Deity, but does not show us the necessary means; and hence arise those superstitious observances and sacrifices which did not fully satisfy the wisest of the heathen. With the same caution he insists, again, upon the practical impotence of the reason in discovering immortality. Some philosophers, he says, denied this great truth; he is unable, it is true, to regard this fact as of 'any very great moment,' because these sects were 'very weak reasoners,' or otherwise what would become of his own view as to the clearness of the demonstration?[2] He declares, however, that the best philosophers had found it difficult to rest in the conclusions they had reached; and when their own minds were clear, had neither the will nor the authority to enforce them duly upon the world.

35. By insisting sufficiently upon such considerations, Clarke thinks that he has cleared the ground for revelation. Reason can raise presumptions all but indistinguishable from demonstration, but they are distinguishable enough to require clenching; reason can even demonstrate the most important truths, but then the demonstration will not persuade the foolish and the vicious, or rouse sufficient zeal in the teachers of mankind; and thus, though the grounds for expecting a revelation appear to be narrowed, Clarke takes courage to declare that there was 'a necessity of some particular revelation' for the effectual reformation of mankind.[3] But once more his argument brings him into danger at its culminating point. His victory threatens to be fatal to him. Though a divine revelation is pronounced to be necessary for the recovery of mankind, the statements in subsequent sections become more moderate. It is 'agreeable to the dictates of nature and right reason to expect or hope for such a divine

[1] Clarke's Works, ii. 662. [2] Ib. p. 662. [3] Ib. p. 667.

revelation;'[1] but he guards himself, and for an excellent reason, against the decisive assertion that natural theology entitles us to pronounce with certainty that a revelation must have been granted. For that assertion would have brought him into collision with notorious facts. The vast numerical majority of the world having never even heard of Christianity, his arguments would either collapse or lead to the deistical conclusion that the light of nature was the only guidance vouchsafed to mankind. Clarke, therefore, modifies his conclusion; on the one hand, 'there is great ground from right reason and the light of nature to believe that God would not always leave men wholly destitute of so needful an assistance;' on the other hand, 'it does not from hence at all follow (as some have imagined) that God is obliged to make such a revelation.'[2]

36. The incongruity of this fragment of merely presumptive and conjectural inference imbedded in the solid mass of mathematical demonstration continues to press him, and he returns more than once to the argument. His most powerful engine of assault is one which did good service to the apologists of Christianity, and consists in the retort of the difficulty upon his antagonists. If revelation be not universal, he says, neither is natural religion; there are poor barbarous nations as ignorant of one as of the other; and the argument that every man must have had a revelation implies the assumption that God was bound to make all his creatures equal; to make men angels; or, at least, to give to all the same opportunities of knowledge that were given to any.[3] As this was notoriously not the case, the deist must admit that his doctrine is beset by difficulties as great as those which were objected to the advocate of Christianity. Here, as in many other places, we are brought in sight of Butler's argument. Meanwhile, it is plain that Clarke's admission, though he labours hard to give it the air of a claim, destroys the special character of his argument. Setting forth with the air of one who will give a mathematical demonstration of the need for a revealed religion, he is confronted by the fact that a revelation, limited in time and space, can by no means satisfy the requirements of his topic. He is driven to

[1] Clarke's Works, ii. 668. [2] Ib. p. 671. [3] Ib. p. 672.

abandon the high *a priori* road, and at the very utmost can only demonstrate that some revelation or other is probable. That any given revelation is the true one can only be proved by evidence applicable to it alone, and consequently of the ordinary *a posteriori* kind. Clarke, accordingly, concludes his book by seeking to prove that Christianity satisfies the internal test of fitness to conformity, to right reason in its moral teaching, and in the motives by which that teaching is enforced, and of sufficient external evidence. There is, he says, no religion but the Christian which has any pretence to be such a revelation; and he proceeds to prove, though we need not follow him, that Christianity satisfies all the tests thus suggested.[1]

37. Clarke occupies a middle position between the orthodox and the deists. He adopts almost entirely the deist method, but applies it on behalf of the colourless doctrine which was in his mind identified with Christianity. More fitly than Tindal, who claimed the name for himself,[2] he might be called a Christian deist. As such he may be considered, as the chief intellectual light of what was then called the Low Church party. Though not an originator of thought, he represented that modification of current opinions which commended itself to the most freethinking party within the borders of the Church. Around him clustered a little group of men, chiefly members of his own University, who were amongst the most vigorous controversialists of their day; though now, almost without exception, consigned to utter oblivion. Poor half-mad Whiston was an admiring friend and biographer. Sykes, Jackson, and Balguy were amongst his attached adherents. Hoadly, the leader of the Latitudinarian party, was his intimate friend and warm admirer; and concludes the Life prefixed to an edition of Clarke's works, by expressing the hope that he would be known in ages to come as 'the Friend of Dr. Clarke.' Young men of promise, such as Butler, Hutcheson, Kames, and Collier (the rival of Berkeley), appealed to him in philosophical difficulties; and, though assailed by the orthodox, led by Waterland, and accused of dishonest compliance with the articles, he plainly

[1] Clarke's Works, ii. 673.

[2] 'Christianity as Old as the Creation,' p. 336.

exerted a powerful influence upon the more liberal thinkers of the day.

38. A name often coupled with Clarke's is that of William Wollaston. Wollaston was a clergyman who, on coming unexpectedly into possession of a fortune, retired—it is the proper word—to the city of London. Here, in the centre of the busiest city in the world, he led a contemplative life, reading much, thinking more, and observing a methodical punctuality worthy of an industrious tradesman. For the last thirty years of his life, he never passed a night away from Charterhouse Square. His life approached that of a monastic student as nearly as is possible to a man who begets eleven children. It was with difficulty that he summoned up courage to publish; and he burnt many treatises as being 'short of that perfection to which he desired and had intended to bring them.' The 'Religion of Nature,' however, slunk into publicity. First printed for private circulation, it rapidly became so popular, that 10,000 copies were sold 'in a very few years;' it reached a seventh edition in 1750, and is quoted with profound respect by contemporary writers. Wollaston's death, in 1724, prevented its completion according to his original design.

39. Thirty years' profound meditation had convinced Wollaston that the reason why a man should abstain from breaking his wife's head was, that it was a way of denying that she was his wife. All sin, in other words, was lying. The crotchet was one of those which can only be obtained by a long course of solitary meditation. Substantially, however, it is a repetition of Clarke's theory of morality. Like Clarke, he affects the forms of the mathematical demonstration. His system of morality, too, like Clarke's, is entirely independent of revelation; and the absence of any direct reference to the Bible gave some scandal to theologians. He deduces the commandments of the first table from general principles, without any explicit reference to Moses.[1] He admits the doctrine of a particular Providence, and of the efficacy of prayer; but seeks to reconcile them with a philosophical view of the uniform order of nature.[2] His ultimate appeal is in all cases to reason, and he quotes Cicero, Seneca,

[1] 'Religion of Nature,' &c., sec. v. prop. xix.
[2] Ib. sec. v. prop. xviii.

Plato, and Aristotle, more frequently than Moses or St. Paul.

40. I notice the book here (I shall touch upon it again in discussing the moral philosophers) chiefly for the sake of a passage which embodies one of the typical arguments. In order to prove the immortality of the soul, he argues that the Almighty is bound to form no creature in whose existence the unavoidable pains will, on the whole, overbalance the pleasures.[1] Every being must either have a surplus of happiness, or be itself to blame for its suffering. Yet, when we seek to confront our theory with the facts, the prevailing misery of mankind is but too palpable. Happiness is rare, and is by no means an invariable consequence of virtue. Think of the war, tyranny, slavery, corruption, disease, and poverty under which the world has groaned for centuries; think of all the hideous stories which deface the pages of history; look back to the martyrdoms of the early Christians and the records of the Inquisition, and you will agree that 'the history of mankind is little else but the history of uncomfortable dreadful passages, and a greater part of it, however things are palliated and gilded over, is scarcely to be read by a good-natured man without amazement, horror, and tears.'[2] Nay, it is impossible to take up a newspaper, or to look out of window, without catching sight of suffering. In the recluse of Charterhouse Square there was potentially a Candide. Even to that quiet retreat, though not then bordering on the masses of squalid pauperism which now startle our comfortable good-natured optimists, there had penetrated echoes from the great chorus of human anguish. In his youth, indeed, Wollaston had suffered from the impecuniosity of himself and his nearest relatives, and had turned the Book of Ecclesiastes into 'Pindarics' in order to give vent to his feelings.[3] How are we to reconcile to the stern realities of the world our beautiful mathematical system of virtue rewarded by happiness, and our neat demonstrations of the infinite beneficence of an Almighty ruler? Of the millions who have suffered, there must be multitudes whose griefs and

[1] 'Religion of Nature,' &c., sec. ix. prop. viii. p. 200. See a similar argument, carried out to its logical extreme, by A. Tucker.

[2] Ib. p. 202. [3] Nicholl's 'Illustrations of Literature,' i. 199.

pangs have far outweighed 'all their enjoyments.'[1] Were not such persons daily making the melancholy journey almost in sight of his windows from Newgate to Tyburn tree? And yet we have demonstrated that such persons cannot exist. The only solution, then, is to assume the existence of some place where the 'proper amends may be made.'[2] We must call a new world into existence to redress the balance of the old. If the soul be not immortal, then either 'there is no God upon whom we can depend, or he is an unreasonable being, or there never has been any man whose sufferings in this world have exceeded his enjoyments without his being the cause of it himself'[3]—propositions all of them opposed to the plainest reasoning or the widest experience.

41. Wollaston is confident enough in his reasoning to colour this world as darkly as possible in order that the prospects of a future life may stand out against it as brightly as possible. If this life be all, he says, 'the general and usual state of mankind is scarce consistent with the idea of a reasonable cause.'[4] He is 'apt to think' that even the most favoured of mortals would scarcely be willing to lead their lives over again,[5] and for one that makes the voyage so happily, thousands are lost in storms. Nay, 'if the souls of men are mortal, the case of brutes is much preferable to that of men.'[6] Their pleasures are genuine, and they are not tormented by cares for the future. And yet we cannot help adding, if Wollaston's argument be sound, there is a cab-horse or two that might put in claims for future compensation.

42. A slight misgiving apparently intruded itself. He begins, he says (and this is the only reference in his book to revelation), to be 'very sensible how much he wants a guide.'[7] An objector asks the very significant question, how can we be certain that God will reward virtue in the next world more liberally than in this? Wollaston briefly, if rather illogically, replies that the inequality in this world is one of the arguments for an equality hereafter, and adds that, in some way or other, the defects of the present world are owing to our 'bodily wants and affections, and such things as proceed

[1] 'Religion of Nature,' &c. p. 202.
[2] Ib. p. 203.
[3] Ib. p. 203.
[4] Ib. p. 205.
[5] Ib. p. 207.
[6] Ib. p. 210.
[7] Ib. p. 211.

from them,' being 'intermixed with human affairs.'[1] It is impossible to say whether this theory, derived from an older school of thought, afforded him any solid satisfaction. Bolingbroke affected to be much scandalised by Wollaston's argument.[2] In his eyes it was an illustration of the tacit alliance supposed to exist between divines and atheists. They united in declaring that the world was full to overflowing of hopeless misery, of virtue unrewarded and crime triumphant. The atheists were perhaps more consistent in arguing that this fragment of the universe was a fair specimen of the whole, than the divines, who, whilst they professed to infer the existence of God from the manifold works of his wisdom and benevolence, declared in the same breath that our life was so wretched as to force us to seek relief in the prospect of a better. Such doubts—whatever their solution—pressed upon the acutest thinkers of that time, as they are likely, in one shape or other, to torment all men who refuse to take refuge from hard fact in the dreamland of fluent theories. Butler is distinguished from almost all the contemporary writers by his profound sense of the heavy burden of human misery. Swift was driven by oppressive vision into savage misanthropy. Voltaire sought refuge from it in the bitterness veiled in mockery of Candide; Hume in calm scepticism; whilst the shallower Bolingbroke affected a flimsy optimism, more in harmony with the ordinary taste. Most of the deists and their opponents passed with averted eyes, and seem to have faintly consented not to press the question home. Deists attacked the Christian theory of a monopoly of revelation as unworthy of the common Father of us all. Christians retorted that the religion of nature was equally limited in its sphere of operation. Behind both parties lay the terrible question whether the Deity, in whom they professed a common belief, had in fact revealed himself by his works or his word. Was revelation to be found in the Bible, in the heart of man, or even on the face of nature? It was easy enough to introduce a future world to round off incomplete systems with apparent harmony. But it was easier to slur over that awful problem till more manlier intellects ventured to probe our doubts to the

[1] 'Religion of Nature,' &c., sec. ix. prop. xii.

[2] Bolingbroke, 'Fragments,' Works, vol. v. 372.

bottom. Meanwhile such rare glimpses into the nether abyss, as Wollaston had hastily caught, were allowed to pass without notice. Both parties continued to build up their comfortable schemes of theology without looking too closely at the foundation, and disputed only as to the propriety of investing them in the old language of orthodoxy, or in the symmetrical language of pure reason. The recollection that there is always this spectre in the background gives a certain sense of hollowness to the discussion; but, for the present, we must be content to follow the development of the narrower controversy.

### *IV. TINDAL AND HIS OPPONENTS.*

43. The theory thus elaborated by Clarke and Wollaston gave rise to no distinct controversy for some years. The writings of Collins and Woolston, the most prominent of the deists, turned upon the external evidences; and though Shaftesbury touched upon the question, he did not explicitly discuss it in such a mode as to provoke an answer. In 1730 appeared a book, which may be said to have marked the culminating point of the whole deist controversy. The time was favourable. Politics were subsiding into the stagnation of the Walpolean era. George II. had quietly succeeded his father; Jacobitism was slowly decaying from within; and even the storm of the excise troubles had not yet ruffled the calm surface of affairs. Voltaire had just left England (1728), after imbibing from the English deists the principles which stored up in his keen intelligence were to be radiated forth in the shape of the keenest of all human sarcasm, and to precipitate in helpless mist the cloudy structures of old superstition. That arch iconoclast appears to have studied with lively sympathy, and turned to good account in his own writings, the argument put forward in 'Christianity as Old as the Creation.' Its author, Matthew Tindal, was a Fellow of All Souls', and must have been a resident at Oxford when Toland, some twelve years his junior, opened the campaign against supernaturalism. The careers of the two men were strongly con-

trasted. Tindal sheltered himself during a long life behind the corner of a comfortable fellowship, and so avoided the strange Bohemian existence of his more impulsive colleague. The calm retirement of an English university suppressed any rash impulsiveness. The chief incident that has been recorded in his life was his temporary conversion to Romanism in the troublous days of James II. He speedily returned to the fold—according to his enemies, because he was guided both in his desertion and his return by a judicious regard to his interests; according to his own account, because he trod in all sincerity the path which has often been followed since his time, and having been seduced by High Church principles into transgressing the lawful limits, found the absurdities of Popery intolerable, and rebounded indignantly into rationalism. His movements, however, were deliberate, as became the member of an ancient corporation. He was about thirty at the time of his first escapade; at the ripe age of nearly fifty, he first attracted notice by a book called 'The Rights of the Christian Church,' which was a vigorous assault upon his former High Church allies; and he was already past seventy when he produced the first volume of 'Christianity as Old as the Creation.' The second, which should have followed, was quietly burked by Bishop Gibson, into whose hands the MS. fell after the author's death, and who acted on the principle that prevention was better than cure. The first volume, however, had done its work. It has not the force of style or the weight of thought which could secure a permanent place in literature; and has become rather heavy reading at the present day. The arrangement is confused; it is full of repetition. Yet it had the merit of bringing out with great distinctness the most essential position of the deists. Tindal was, in reality, just one stage in advance of Tillotson, Hoadly, Clarke, and other latitudinarian divines from whom he borrowed, and whose authority he freely quotes. He was to Clarke what Toland had been to Locke. The indignation which he produced amongst their followers was the livelier because he seemed to be unmasking their secret thoughts, and formulating the conclusions for which they had already provided the premisses. Are you aware, asked some disputant, that the necessary inference from your argument is so and so? Yes,

replied his antagonist, but I don't draw it. Tindal insisted upon drawing it, and was reviled accordingly.

44. The main argument of the book may be stated in half-a-dozen lines. God is infinitely wise, good, just, and immutable. Human nature is also unchangeable. Therefore the law which God lays down for men will be perfect and unalterable. The intermediate proposition, as then understood, was tautologous. Human nature was that property in man which was found by abstracting from individual men all the qualities in which they differed. To say, therefore, that it was uniform, was merely to say that, whatever was common to all men was common to all men. To transform this proposition into the very different one, that men in all ages have been the same for all religious purposes, was a fallacy easy enough of detection when once stated, but which runs through all the philosophy of that age, and is still vigorous in many contemporary reasonings. Setting this aside for the moment, Tindal's argument goes very closely to the root of the matter. The difficulty to which he gave partial expression was the great difficulty of an historical religion. God is the creator of this vast universe; the Almighty Creator and Ruler of mankind, the source of all wisdom, the supreme legislator from whom all morality derives its sanctity, the inscrutable Being whom all men more or less dimly acknowledge in their hearts. Do we, then, render befitting homage to this august conception when we identify the God of reason with the God who selected a small, barbarous and obscure tribe in one little corner of the earth as the sole recipients of his favour; when we declare that he imposed upon them a number of frivolous and absurd laws, or gave them commands which shock our sense of justice and humanity; when we hold that he allows a favoured class of mortals like ourselves to enjoy a monopoly of his grace, which they may retail to their humble followers; reveals to them the sole knowledge of the mysteries of his nature, and damns to everlasting torment all who by ignorance or misfortune are disqualified from receiving their magical privileges? Bring into contact, in short, the two conceptions—the God before whom we bow as the highest object of all our hopes and aspirations, and the God of Moses, or even the God of Christian theologians—and see whether the two can be made

to coalesce. Tindal's rather dry and formal argumentations are an attempt to exclaim in the dialect of the day :

> The builder of this universe was wise ;
> He planned all souls, all systems, planets, particles :
> The plan he shaped all worlds and æons by
> Was—heavens !—was thy small nine-and-thirty articles !

45. Tindal, indeed, was not, like the writer of those lines, dazzled and overwhelmed by the terror of the Infinite. His Deity was not shrouded in thick clouds and darkness ; nor was it his objection to the Articles that they profess to measure heaven and hell with a foot-rule.[1] He was perfectly capable, for that matter, of fathoming the Divine nature, and of providing good working drawings of the universe, admirable for their simplicity and clearness. He and the 'judicious Dr. Scott,' for example, knew precisely why God loves himself ;[2] he speaks as though he had been present when the contract upon which was founded the Law of Nature was drawn up and signed by the respective parties ; and he can define with the utmost accuracy the reciprocal rights and duties of man and man's Creator. But, in spite of this failing, Tindal held strongly to a conviction which gives a certain elevation to his tone. Tindal's Deity, if rather too definable, is not petty or capricious in his dealings with the world. That hypothetical contract must, he is convinced, have been perfectly fair as between God and man, perfectly impartial as between God and the different races of man, and throughout rational, just, and intelligible. He, therefore, repudiates with genuine indignation all the arbitrary enactments which, as he maintained, had been foisted by priestcraft into the original code ; and declines to accept the more or less ingenious devices by which Clarke and his school had smuggled in a certain number of purely Christian by-laws, on the plea that they were merely corollary and supplementary enactments.

46. Unable, or unwilling, explicitly to deny the reality of

[1] 'The wise and righteous governor of the universe may not, perhaps, square his measures by any system of divinity now extant,' says Tindal's follower, Dr. Morgan ('Physico-Theology,' p. 297).

[2] 'Christianity as Old as the Creation,' p. 19. Scott was the author of the 'Christian Life' (1681–6) ; a book very popular during this generation, and highly praised by Addison in the 'Spectator,' No. 447.

a revelation, he substantially argues that it was superfluous, or rather that it amounted to a mere duplicate of the original document as written upon the hearts of men. Natural and revealed religion, he declares, differ not in their substance but in their mode of communication; 'the one being the internal, the other the external, revelation of the will of a Being who is alike at all times infinitely wise and good.'[1] Natural and revealed religion, as he puts it elsewhere, must, 'like two talkers, exactly answer one another'[2]—a statement sufficiently explanatory of the title of his book, itself borrowed from a sermon in which Sherlock had declared that 'the gospel was a republication of the law of nature, and its precepts declarative of that original religion which was *as Old as the Creation*.' Statements, indeed, of a very similar kind abound in the writings of all the liberal theologians of the day, and Tindal is at no loss for confirmatory quotations. The unassisted reason of man is abundantly able to discover the few and simple truths of which genuine religion consists. The argument of the Churches is dexterously inverted. Man, they urged, cannot by his own powers discover the mysteries of revelation; therefore, he must bow to the authority of those to whom God has confided the only key to the truth. Man, retorted Tindal, cannot discover your mysteries; but God must have dealt equally with all men; and, therefore, doctrines not revealed to all cannot be doctrines imposed upon all by God; reason, the only faculty granted to all men, must of necessity be sufficient to guide all men to truth. Reason is of necessity the sole judge, for universal scepticism is the only alternative; 'the very attempt to destroy reason by reason is a demonstration that men have nothing but reason to trust to,'[3] and as reason is the sole judge, so its tendency to promote the happiness of mankind is the sole test of the truth of any creed. It would be blasphemy to suppose that God can require anything for his own sake, or that he can inflict punishments except with a view to reformation—a doctrine which, as he sufficiently hints, it will be hard to reconcile with a belief in an eternal hell.[4]

47. Modes of worship and all positive regulations must be

[1] 'Christianity as Old as the Creation,' p. 2.
[2] Ib. p. 51.
[3] Ib. p. 158.
[4] Ib. p. 36.

judged by their fitness to promote human happiness. The view that such observances have an absolute value because required by God for his own sake, has been fostered by priests, who have found their account in the irrational superstitions thus engendered.[1] In short, Tindal's view is that obedience to nature is the one sufficient principle. 'Whoever so regulates his natural appetites as will conduce most to the exercise of his reason, the health of his body, and the pleasures of his senses taken and considered together (since herein his happiness consists), may be certain he can never offend his Maker; who, as he governs all things according to their natures, can't but expect his rational creatures should act according to their natures.'[2] Religion consists of those simple truths whose very familiarity causes us to overlook them. According to Selden's 'somewhat homely' illustration, men look after it 'as the butcher did after his knife, when he had it in his mouth.'[3] Briefly stated, it consists 'in a constant disposition of mind to do all the good we can, and thereby render ourselves acceptable to God in answering the end of his creation.'[4] It may be epitomised in the maxims of the Sermon on the Mount, or, as Tindal would add, expressed more reasonably by Confucius.[5] He is thus radically opposed to the views, common to many divines, which laid the whole stress upon the external evidences. Miracles, the only external proof, may prove anything, and have been alleged in behalf of all religions.[6] The one satisfactory test, therefore, for distinction between the true and false miracles, must be the coincidence of the revealed doctrine with the teaching of our own reason. 'It's an odd jumble,' he says, and the argument provoked a good deal of laborious controversy from his opponents, 'to prove the truth of a book by the truth of the doctrines it contains, and at the same time to conclude those doctrines to be true because contained in that book.'[7]

48. Starting from these principles, Tindal makes a clean sweep of all those dogmas in which the simple precepts of

[1] 'Christianity as Old as the Creation,' p. 40.
[2] Ib. p. 14.
[3] Ib. p. 54.
[4] Ib. p. 18.
[5] Ib. p. 310.
[6] Ib. pp. 169–70.
[7] Ib. p. 164.

morality are clothed by the orthodox. Asceticism in all its forms is summarily condemned; for God can take no pleasure in the self-torture of his creatures. Nothing can be added to, any more than anything can be subtracted from, the Law of Nature. To impose additional duties is to abridge the liberty to which all men have a right under that law. To impose arbitrary duties is utterly unworthy of an immutable and perfect Being. To the growth of a belief in such duties is due the power of priests, with all its natural accompaniments of bloody persecution and religious strife; and priests in search of power have fostered the growth of these superstitions, or, indeed, have deliberately invented them. They have erected trifling observances into sacred duties, and converted them into sources of power and profit. This hatred of priestcraft in the abstract is pointed by a bitter sarcasm against the nonjurors and high-churchmen of his day. He touches, though with comparative reserve, upon some of the doctrines common to almost all Christian Churches. It wants little ingenuity, for example, to interpret such a statement as this. What, he asks, can be more absurd than the errors into which people fell when they deserted the Light of Nature, or when the pagans believed that god Mercury could be sent on a message by god Jupiter? There was nothing too absurd for them to maintain 'after they had destroyed the unity of God, except it was that Jupiter and Mercury, the sender and the sent, were the same God.'[1] The Roman Catholic superstitions could be more openly assailed. What right, he asks, has a Papist who rubs a dying man with oil to laugh at the Indian who thinks it will conduce to his future happiness to die with a cow's tail in his hands?[2] What should we think of a stranger who announced to us as a divine revelation, that the salvation of our children depended on our having their nails pared with certain ceremonies by certain people at a certain time?[3] Yet, he says, the Mahommedans think that their nails must be pared when they are mortally sick—an analogy which we are left to apply for ourselves. But the full strength of Tindal's batteries is directed against the Jew-

[1] 'Christianity as Old as the Creation,' p. 75; and see a stronger passage, p. 379, where the theory of the Atonement is openly and vigorously attacked.

[2] Ib. p. 111. [3] Ib.

ish legends. Judaism is, of course, the typical instance of a religion in which positive precepts are combined with moral laws; and on every occasion Tindal manages, under some flimsy veil of reserve, to express for the whole Hebrew race that aversion which was, for this reason, amongst others, characteristic of all the deist controversialists. He ridicules, for example, the practice of circumcision, borrowed by the Jews, as Marsham had proved, from the Egyptians, and denounces the whole theory of sacrifice as implying a low conception of God.[1] The biblical history supplies innumerable examples of the necessity of checking the extravagances of superstition by calm reason. From the stories of Balaam's ass and of Abraham's peculiar mode of securing his wife from the attention of princes, up to the more revolting accounts of the ferocious massacres of the Canaanites, and the practice of human sacrifice,[2] he finds abundant illustrations of the evils of priestcraft and 'enthusiasm.' In this respect, Tindal, with incomparably inferior powers of sarcasm, is a predecessor of Voltaire. Admiration of the Chinese and hatred of the Jews, the typical examples of the two opposite religious systems, were natural characteristics in the man whom his great successor approved as 'the intrepid defender of natural religion.' This part of Tindal's book provoked a remarkable controversy, to be noticed hereafter. At present, it is enough to notice the concluding chapter, in which he explicitly attacks the arguments by which Clarke had sought to reconcile the deist argument with the orthodox conclusions.

49. The general line of argument is the same as that which precedes. Tindal vigorously presses Clarke with his assertions of the clearness and sufficiency of the Law of Nature, in order to show the inconsistency of his attempt to escape on the ground of a necessity of certain supplementary revelations. Tindal's final conclusion is sufficiently indicative of his position. There are, he says,[3] some things whose internal excellence sufficiently proves their divine origin; there are others, which, though of no intrinsic value, are useful as means to an end; and they must necessarily be left to human discretion and vary according to circumstances. And, finally,

[1] 'Christianity as Old as the Creation,' p. 78.
[2] Ib. p. 81.
[3] Ib. p. 390.

there are some things so essentially indifferent as to be useful neither as means nor ends; the observance of which, as a part of religion, is highly superstitious. 'He that carries these distinctions in his mind will have a truer notion of religion than if he had read all the schoolmen, fathers, and councils.'[1]

50. There is, however, one part of the argument which demands a little further notice, as curiously characteristic of the contemporary point of view. If anyone should now argue from the immutability of God and of human nature that religion must be the same in all times and places, the reply would be obvious. Theologians and men of science would unite in answering that the history of the human race is a history of development. Whether that development be described as a process of divine education or as an evolution determined by natural laws, it would be equally admitted on all hands that man in the infancy of the race was fitted for an order of ideas entirely different from that which would be appropriate at a later epoch. But in all the contemporary controversies there is a curious inability to accept this view; and nothing can more distinctly indicate how modern is that conception of progress which is now so familiar to us all. When pressed with the difficulty thus distinctly brought forward by Tindal, theologians endeavoured to evade the argument by bringing forward the theological dogma of corruption. They admitted that God was bound to reveal his will to man in the original state of innocence; but things were different after Eve had eaten the apple. Clarke had adopted this theory, and theologians continued to reassert it without taking much notice of Tindal's forcible answer. It, in fact, amounts, as he shows, to accepting the degrading view which the deist sought to fix upon them. If men are always accountable to God, this doctrine would imply that God unjustly demanded from them a religious knowledge which they had no means of acquiring. 'If men alike, at all times, owe their existence to God, they at all times must be created in a state of innocence capable of knowing and doing all God requires of them.'[2] Clarke is, in fact, supposing that 'God had left all mankind for 4,000 years together, and even the

[1] 'Christianity as Old as the Creation,' p. 391. [2] Ib. p. 340.

greatest part to this day, destitute of sufficient means to do their duty.'[1] Our *a priori* perception of the injustice of such a course must override our *a posteriori* inference that it was actually the case. But the facts, according to Tindal, are as conclusive as the argument. He endeavours to vindicate the ancient philosophers from Clarke's attack, and to prove that, as a matter of fact, they had discovered the whole religion of nature for themselves. On the other hand, he ridicules the biblical story of the Fall, on which Clarke relied to prove the corruption. Did it not, in fact, prove, if it proved anything, that Adam and Eve were as weak as any of their descendants? How can we suppose that Adam's understanding was injured when the result of the transaction is summed up in the words 'the man is become like one of us, to know Good and Evil'? And, moreover, does not the whole narrative bristle with childish absurdities, which are set forth in the genuine Voltairian spirit?[2]

51. Tindal, however, pushes his argument still further. It is rather curious to find that, in the writings of this time, the position of theologians and their opponents is inverted, and belief in the reality of moral progress was then a Christian, as it is now, on the whole, an infidel dogma. One chief reason is doubtless that, since the world has departed further from the old beliefs, their adherents have thought that it must be deteriorating. At that time, the Christian apologists were eager to show that, much as they were in the habit of rebuking the faithlessness of the time, men were, nevertheless, better under the Christian dispensation than of old.[3] Tindal, on the other hand, is eager to show that human nature has been the same in all ages; men have, if anything, rather fallen off. 'What impartial man,' he asks, 'who has compared the former and present condition of mankind, can think the world much mended since the times of Tiberius; or, though ever so well versed in Church history, can, from the conduct of Christians, find that they arrive to any higher state of perfection than the rest of mankind, who are supposed to continue

[1] 'Christianity as Old as the Creation,' p. 339. [2] Ib. p. 348, &c.

[3] *E.g.*, see Berkeley's 'Minute Philosopher,' dial. v. § 12; Stebbing, 'On the Use and Necessity of Revelation,' p. 104; 'Leland against Tindal,' Preface, p. xlvi.

in their degeneracy and corruption?'[1] Leibnitz is quoted as preferring the Chinese as the moral superiors of Christians; and it seems that a missionary attributed it to the special providence of God that that exemplary race did not know what was done in Christendom, 'for otherwise there would be never a man among them but would spit in our faces.' Christianity, said Bishop Kidder, would perhaps be the last religion a wise man would choose, if he were guided by the lives of those who profess it. Tindal himself observes that, whereas man is naturally, on Clarke's showing, a benign and social creature, and natural religion tends to improve this temper, the doctrine which generally passes for Christianity has made him fierce and cruel, and caused him to act towards unoffending people in such a manner 'as could not have entered into the hearts of men to conceive, even though they were in the doctor's unavoidable state of degeneracy and corruption.'[2]

52. Tindal, it has been said, was a Christian; and the statement may be accepted if by Christianity is meant a belief in the laws of ordinary morality. There is no difference, as he characteristically says, between religion and morality, except that one is 'acting according to the reason of things considered in themselves; the other acting according to the same reason of things considered as the rule of God.'[3] In so far as the Christian faith differs from a simple code of morality, it would seem that Tindal's state of mind was pretty much that of Voltaire. He attacks not merely the Old Testament, but the New,[4] and explicitly assails the mysteries of which Toland had indirectly sapped the foundation.[5] Such, at any rate, was the impression which he made upon his contemporaries; and, in spite of the affected contempt of the orthodox, he was considered, and with some justice, as a formidable enemy. His argument, indeed, strikes the weak point of Clarke's peculiar form of rationalism. It was in vain that, after exhausting their eloquence to prove the competence of human reason and the absolute clearness and simplicity of religious truth, writers of that school laboured to establish some narrow standing-ground for revelation. They had, in their own opinion, raised

[1] 'Christianity as Old as the Creation,' p. 366.
[2] Ib. p. 367.
[3] Ib. p. 270.
[4] Ib. p. 233, &c.
[5] *E.g.* p. 182.

such immovable pillars for the support of morality, that the old-fashioned props became first superfluous and then offensive. When their necessity was no longer felt in practice, men had leisure to remark upon their antiquated and grotesque design, and to observe how inadequate they were for the task imposed upon them. So far, Tindal's victory was undeniable; though his own flank was equally liable to be turned, and his antagonists were not slow to perceive their advantage. So long as the controversy was confined within the prescribed limits, nothing could run more easily than Tindal's logic.

53. There must be, so at least it appeared from the generally admitted premisses, a plain and simple code of rules which every man could discover for himself. But when this charming theory came to be compared with the facts there was evidently a gap somewhere. Man in the abstract has an indefeasible right, it may be, to know the first four rules of arithmetic; but, as a matter of fact, nine-tenths of mankind in the concrete know nothing about them. Cicero, perhaps, and Confucius, and a sage or two up and down the world had worked out the problem and found the correct answer; but look at a brutal cannibal, or at the first ten people you meet in the streets of London, and then talk, if you can, about the universality of the Light of Nature! If reason be so partially distributed by its Divine source, why should the equally partial distribution of revelation raise any presumption against its coming from the same high origin? Each of the most conspicuous champions who took up Tindal's challenge put this retort in his own fashion. All of them asserted that reason was in practice insufficient; the more orthodox added that it was intrinsically unable to discover the truth. And, substantially, though of course they added various collateral arguments, this is the main substance of their reply. Four of these replies, which obtained a certain notoriety, may be regarded as the authoritative exposition of the Christian case; and, though their authors all belonged to the latitudinarian party, they are at least significant of the view taken by the ablest of the orthodox thinkers. Two of the assailants are all but indistinguishable in their views from Tindal himself. Substantially, that is, they held the same

doctrine, though it was made orthodox by a veneering of the old phraseology, to which they attached what now seems an exaggerated importance. They were James Foster, an eminent dissenter, whose memory is preserved chiefly by Pope's lines—

> Let modest Foster, if he will, excell
> Ten metropolitans in preaching well—

and A. A. Sykes, a clergyman of the Church of England, a prolific controversial writer, and a disciple of Clarke and Hoadly, whose adherence to the Church gave some scandal even in that latitudinarian age.

54. Foster, himself a dissenter from the dissenters, pronounces with unusual vigour in favour of freethinking. He holds protection to be of so little real service to Christianity that he would have free discussion of its merits 'encouraged to the utmost.'[1] He says that deists are not to be blamed for disguising their assaults until an open declaration of their opinions involves no danger.[2] Nay, he goes so far as to admit that his antagonist deserves civil treatment, and, more strangely still, practises what he preaches. He explicitly accepts in all their completeness Tindal's fundamental propositions. The religion of nature is of 'supreme and immutable excellency;' it is 'as old as creation,' as 'extensive as human nature;' to restore it is the chief design of revelation; and reason is the ultimate rule by which revelation must itself be tested.[3] All this, he says, is granted; but he seeks to prove the modest theorem that revelation may be useful in enforcing truths already discoverable by reason; and may lay down some rules for the stimulation of virtue. His vigorous assertion of the theoretical competency of the Light of Nature is tempered by strong language as to its failure in practically guiding men to truth. All men, he says, have the faculty of reason, and their differences are due to education alone; yet those differences are so vast that the least civilised races are scarcely distinguishable except in outward form from the brutes.[4] The monstrous superstitions of papists and pagans, and the low notions of their gods entertained in old days by the common people in every country, are sufficient proofs of the inadequacy of un-

[1] Foster's 'Usefulness, &c., of the Christian Revelation,' p. 175.
[2] Ib. Preface. [3] Ib. p. 4. [4] P. 13.

assisted reason. Facts everywhere rebut the presumption raised from *a priori* considerations of the justice of God. It might seem, he admits, that God is 'obliged' to give to all what he gives to any.[1] The plausibility of the assertion presses him hard. But whatever God ought to have done, it is easy to see what he has done. He ought, one might have supposed, to have made all men good logicians; as a fact, he has made many 'downright idiots,'[2] and may therefore make idiotic people. If men have all equal rights against their Creator (it is curious to observe this intrusion of the revolutionary theory of politics into the religious sphere), it is perfectly certain that they don't get them. Under such circumstances, what can we do but frankly confess our ignorance and assume that God must have had some good reasons which (strange as it may appear) we do not fully understand?[3]

55. Having thus proved that the Almighty may make a revelation to some of his creatures without giving lawful cause of complaint, Foster tries to prove that it may consist in part of positive rules. He advances hesitatingly and carefully, repudiating the inference that such laws can be an essential part of true religion, or made binding upon mankind at large.[4] But may not God Almighty add a law or two not exactly arbitrary, and yet not founded on direct moral considerations? May he not prescribe a harmless ceremony here and there without giving his reason? May he not lay down a few rules of conduct for which we cannot precisely account, so long, be it well understood, as he makes it quite clear that their moral tendency is unexceptionable? Foster, though expressing himself in carefully guarded language, manages to see his way to allowing these powers to be constitutional. He tells us that, though no miracles could prove the divine origin of irrational and immoral doctrines, yet 'we are far from being sure that he (the Almighty, that is) can *in no case whatever* enjoin the practice of *indifferent* things, for which there does not appear from the peculiar nature or tendency of the things themselves to be any *special* reason.'[5] If such reflections convince us that the rights of God are rather more extensive than we might fancy at first sight, we may easily

[1] Foster, p. 67.
[2] Ib. p. 66.
[3] Ib. p. 76.
[4] Ib. p. 261.
[5] Ib. p. 282.

reconcile ourselves to the requirements of Christianity, which only consists after all in 'two or three plain and useful positive duties.'[1] Baptism, for example (Foster was converted at a ripe age to the practice of adult baptism), is simply a solemn profession of a man's resolution to be a good Christian, and puts him, 'at his first setting out in religion, upon examining the evidences of it, and the different natures and consequences of virtue and vice.'[2] What more reasonable? and would not the attempt to prove that it has no ill consequences be 'trifling with the reader in an age in which the practice of cold bathing is so frequently recommended even to the most tender constitutions, and acknowledged to have such excellent effects?'[3] There is no difficulty after this in defending the Lord's Supper; and Foster takes the opportunity to explain his view of the doctrine of the Atonement, much in the spirit of the modern rationalisers. It is purged of these notions of a sacrifice performed to pacify an inexorable Being, which have been imported into it by the subtle distinctions and metaphysical entanglements of later Christianity. The duty of worshipping through a mediator having then passed through a similar process, Christianity becomes a reasonable system, which, if not in all parts discoverable by human reason, is certainly in no part opposed to it.

56. With these negative arguments on behalf of Christianity must be combined the more positive assertions that the authority of revelation may enforce truths that would otherwise be neglected; that miracles, though only to be accepted when exhibiting wisdom and beneficence as well as power, might serve 'to engage attention even to moral doctrines,' and would be useful if they helped only to 'balance men's prejudices and excite them to an honest impartial enquiry.'[4] They may too in some cases give a sanction to doctrines not demonstrable, though agreeable to reason—such, for example, as the eternity of future rewards. The external evidence is sufficiently clear and open to general examination of all men, though he admits, whilst explaining away, a certain difficulty in the case of people who 'cannot read.'[5]

57. Foster, it may be observed, shares the peculiar preju-

[1] Foster, p. 302.
[2] Ib. p. 311.
[3] Ib. p. 313.
[4] Ib. p. 59.
[5] Ib. p. 178.

dices against the Jews, which the orthodox of that age might fairly regard as the mark of the beast. They are quoted amongst the races whose conceptions of the Deity were dishonourable. Their fancied monopoly of the Divine favour made them 'narrow and selfish, conceited of their own superior privileges, and insolent and cruel to all who were not of their religion.' A similar taint appears in Sykes, whose arguments, though similar to Foster's, are perhaps even nearer to pure Deism. He appeals to the deist's pets, the Chinese, and indeed seems to agree with the opinion quoted by Tindal from Bishop Kidder. Idolatry, he declares, flourishes more in Christian than in Mahommedan countries, and wickedness abounds in Europe much more than in China. He argues at great length that the heathens know as much of moral truths as Christians; and, moreover, that their knowledge is not due to any dim rays of light from heaven, struggling down from primeval times. The future state is so far from being made known to us by revelation, that its reality is capable of the 'strictest demonstration,'[1] and was actually discovered by the 'ancients,'[2] a charmingly vague word comprehending Homer, Virgil, the Gauls, the Druids, Xenophon, Cicero, and Sallust. Revelation, however, has its value. It neither extends nor corrects the law of nature; but it supplies 'free agents with new arguments, and new motives to do what is right.'[3] Thus, for example, it supplements the demonstrative argument for a future state by an 'argument from eyesight,'[4] namely, the resurrection of Jesus; and it has 'added many circumstances' about our spiritual bodies and so on, which must be unfailing incentives to right action. Yet Christians are far worse than the Chinese. However this may be accounted for, the Christian revelation must be true, because Daniel prophesied of a Messiah more than five hundred years before Christ, and Isaiah said that Babylon would be destroyed by the Medes 188 years before it was taken by Cyrus.

Christianity of this kind is like a ship ready for launching; knock out a single bolt, and the whole structure will glide into the deep waters of infidelity.

[1] Sykes's 'Principles and Connection of Natural and Revealed Religion,' p. 249.
[2] Ib. p. 394. [3] Ib. p. 100. [4] Ib. p. 249.

58. The more orthodox and commonplace form of reply is represented by another pair of writers, Conybeare and Leland. John Conybeare was a schoolfellow and friend of Foster's; he was at this time head of Exeter College, and subsequently Dean of Christchurch, and Butler's successor in the see of Bristol. The latter promotions, due in part at least to the reputation acquired by his discomfiture of the arch-enemy, Tindal, attest the high contemporary reputation of his work. Warburton pronounced it to be 'one of the best reasoned books in the world,' and many people gave credit to his own loud asseverations that Warburton was a judge of reasoning. The form of the compliment was apparently suggested by the care with which Conybeare parades certain logical distinctions destined to unmask his antagonist's fallacies. Substantially, the arguments are those which supplied the ordinary theological currency of the time, and circulated freely through some thousands of pulpits. He begins by pointing out with much logical parade that human beings are not omniscient, and charges Tindal, not quite fairly, with making that modest assumption. Tindal asserted the competence of reason to construct a complete law of nature. If this principle 'be understood in a universal sense'—that is, as implying that we can judge of the whole system of the universe—it 'is wrong; if in a limited one, his conclusion fails.'[1] As there are limits to our knowledge, we should not be above receiving some information from the Almighty as to the proper way of behaving ourselves. The vastness and complexity of the studies necessary to the formation of a complete science of morality are contrasted with the weakness of our abilities. 'No one man,' we are told, 'even of the strongest parts, and under the most advantageous circumstances, has ever yet exhausted any art or science.'[2] Moral philosophy is so difficult that Locke shrank from the task of demonstrating its truths; whilst Wollaston's unprecedented success showed how much remained to be discovered even in the eighteenth century.[3] Bit by bit, in divers times and places, the different propositions may be puzzled out, though mere human reason had perhaps never at any one moment effected a complete

[1] Conybeare's 'Defence of Revealed Religion,' &c., p. 39.
[2] Ib. p.
[3] Ib. p. 230.

synthesis. Revelation opens a royal road to conclusions, which otherwise would have awaited the slow discoveries of centuries. It provides us with a telescope[1]—the illustration is Conybeare's own—to make plain that which was before dimly visible, and to help us to entirely fresh discoveries. We may know the first principles of geometry without being able to master all the conclusions of a Newton or a Halley;[2] and we may be in want of a teacher, though, when we have one, we are not incompetent to judge of the value of his teaching. Revelation, in short, did at once for morality that which Newton had done for astronomy. The key to the puzzle was directly bestowed by heaven, instead of being the prize of centuries of human labour.

59. By dwelling upon these topics Conybeare seeks to depress our estimate of human powers. The mere effort to circumscribe the province of reason is enough to distinguish him from such writers as Sykes and Foster; and yet, when he descends to particulars we find that the actual retrenchments are of trivial importance. He admits that 'the more general points of morality, whatever they may be, are still knowable by every man, even by those of the meanest parts;'[3] that reason can discover the existence of an omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, and morally perfect God, and discover our duty towards Him and our neighbours.[4] Tindal had claimed little more, and Conybeare differs from him chiefly in dimly presenting to us a vast perspective of unattainable knowledge. We are at the mere preface of moral science, and beyond us is a whole volume of complex propositions to be discovered only by painful reasoning or direct revelation. This, at least, is the impression produced by his language; but he is open to obvious retorts. What are these special propositions revealed in the Gospels, and not attainable by philosophers? Sykes[5] afterwards challenged men of Conybeare's views to produce any 'point of morality . . . not discoverable in the tables of men's hearts, or . . . by reason;' and Conybeare,

[1] Conybeare, p. 220. Henry Dodwell says, in reference to this telescope argument, that though telescopes may satisfy the 'curious,' this does not seem to be a suitable property of the light which was to shine before all people ('Christianity not Founded on Argument,' p. 43).

[2] Ib. p. 246.

[3] Ib. p. 234.

[4] Ib. p. 111.

[5] Sykes's 'Principles,' &c., p. 241.

answering the challenge by anticipation, is in obvious difficulty. He thinks that natural religion alone would not enable us to decide how God should be worshipped, 'what are the several instances of justice, and what the measures and extent of charity,'[1] and doubts whether it would condemn suicide, though it can prove murder is wrong. But he is glad to escape from these details into general considerations of the stupidity of mankind. In fact, infidels might doubt how much revelation had added to these facts; whether it had defined precisely 'how far we ought to sacrifice our own interests to those of other men,' or added much to the theory of suicide.[2]

60. Conybeare, therefore, relies more decidedly on the obviously stronger ground of the practical influence of Christianity. Its sanctions are clearer; the dim conjectures of philosophers as to a future life—for Conybeare, with a disregard of facts, characteristic of the time, assumes that this belief took its rise in philosophical speculations—become more certain and definite; moral rules are based on irrefragable authority; and it becomes easier to provide 'a competent number of instructors,'[3] who can promulgate moral rules more simply and authoritatively. He labours also to prove that religion receives, so to speak, a different colouring. Cautiously and apologetically separating himself from Clarke, he argues, though he admits the point to be a 'tender one,' that the fitness of things is subsequent rather than antecedent to the will of God.[4] The question seems to concern natural as well as revealed religion, and is therefore, at first sight, scarcely relevant in an argument against Tindal. His purpose is, apparently, to show that the essence of duty lies in obedience to the will of God, and that we must in all cases act from a conscious regard to that supreme authority, and not from a consideration of that mysterious 'fitness of things,' which seemed to lower the Almighty to a secondary position in the universe. 'Otherwise,' he says, 'we shall perform acts of moral virtue upon principles which will not make them instances of obedience. We shall perform them merely because we like to do so,[5] and if we liked to do the contrary we might

[1] Conybeare, p. 83.
[2] Ib. p. 57.
[3] Ib. p. 355.
[4] Ib. p. 64.
[5] Ib. p. 200.

as easily be led to do it.' Hence follows an inference to which Conybeare attaches the highest importance. Since obedience is of the essence of duty, it is desirable to have commands destined expressly to exercise our obedience; and upon this ground he meets Tindal's objection to the positive precepts of Christianity. He gradually satisfies himself that God may not only give us laws without assigning his reasons[1]—as, for example, when forbidding Adam and Eve to eat the fruit of a tree without telling them that its poisonous nature was the real cause of prohibition—but[2] may also give commands founded on practical convenience alone (such as prohibiting the Jews from eating swine's flesh 'if the eating of it subjected the Jews to greater inconveniences than were incident to other people'); and, yet further, that he may give commands not founded on reason in cases which are intrinsically indifferent, but where it is desirable to have some rule. The ultimate justification is the very sufficient one, that God may do as he likes with his own. If earthly rulers may prescribe forms of worship, 'surely God hath an equal right to do the same; and if it be upon several accounts fit and proper that such matters should be determined, I cannot see why God should not as reasonably determine them as men; especially as the Divine authority is much more indisputable, and such as must . . . . have an infinitely greater weight with them.'[3] The same answer confutes the argument brought from the partiality as well as from the arbitrary nature of revelation. God will only judge men in proportion to their opportunities. 'As, therefore, men are not made accountable to God merely for not doing it (the revealed law), so neither can God be accountable for not granting it. His proceedings in this respect are entirely in his own power, and, therefore, as he may bestow or not bestow a revelation as he pleases, so he is the most proper judge when and to whom to grant it.'[4]

61. The grotesque turn of thought observable in many of these arguments is unpleasantly significant of the superficial nature of the controversy. God is a mere formula, who rounds off an argument, but scarcely impresses the imagina-

[1] Conybeare, p. 155.
[2] Ib. p. 158.
[3] Ib. p. 204.
[4] Ib. p. 419.

tion; and thus the rights of the Almighty Ruler of the universe are defined as a constitutional lawyer might lay down the permissible limits of action of a British sovereign. The method is carried to greater lengths by John Leland—most worthy, painstaking, and commonplace of divines. His life was devoted for many years to the extirpation of the most pestilent theological vermin of the time; and, as he was a dissenter, his labours were cheered by no hopes of a bishopric. The literary historian owes him a considerable debt of gratitude for his 'View of the Deistical Writers,' though the argument, which Leland doubtless valued more than the literary information, has sunk into painful disregard. Never for a moment does he blunder into lively or original remark; and, if he becomes paradoxical, it is not from superabundant vivacity, but because his intellectual vision is too confined by blinkers which prevent him from discerning the plainest pitfalls. Tindal was the first victim of his controversial energy; and Leland plods ponderously through a line of argument substantially identical with Conybeare's. Perhaps he lowers reason a degree further in the scale; but he is ready to extol it when necessary for argumentative purposes. When assailing natural religion, he declares that on no subject are mankind more prone to degrading error than in their conceptions of the Deity. When defending revealed religion, he declares them perfectly competent to examine the evidence, decide upon the authenticity of the records, and the credibility of the witnesses. Foster, with his views of the powers of the human reason, had been more consistent in arguing that the 'common people' could easily satisfy themselves by studying the evidence on both sides, whether Christianity was true or false, and in pointing out that even those who could not read, could easily obtain the necessary materials for judgment. Foster, however, maintains that they are still better judges of the internal than of the external evidence; whereas Leland says that questions of fact are simpler than philosophical disputes as to the nature of things. Man is, in his view, a kind of Bentley-Caliban—a fetish worshipper on one side, and an accomplished critic on the other. Admitting—a most indisputable proposition!—that human nature remains 'the same in all its essential faculties—in all that is essentially necessary to con-

stitute human nature'[1]—he maintains that since the Fall the greater part of mankind have been plunged in the lowest depths of ignorance and stupidity. They can, indeed, verify statements which they could not discover; but he succeeds in putting together a more imposing list than Conybeare of inevitable gaps in the law of nature. The exposure of children, community of women, and suicide are amongst the features which we could not have condemned without a supernatural revelation; and our unassisted faculties, it seems, are insufficient to condemn Mandeville's theory that private vices are public benefits. Endeavouring, again, to justify the doctrine of the Atonement, he remarks that the question depends upon things with which we are little acquainted—'the nature and ends of the Divine government, how far and in what instances it is fit for God to exercise his justice or his mercy, and what is proper for infinite wisdom to do in the government of the moral world.'[2] An excellent consideration of the worthy Leland! The universe is vast, and it is highly proper to entangle the infidel in its mazes; but sound divines know a secret or two, and can give a shrewd guess as to 'what it is proper for infinite wisdom to do.' The clue which guides them is simple. The Ruler of the universe may be expected to act as a highly intelligent earthly monarch. The analogy which Butler sought to establish between Divine operation as manifested in revelation and in nature, was superseded by an analogy between revelation and the British constitution. Conybeare, though occasionally reasoning in this manner, expresses a consciousness of danger; but Leland plunges into the argument without a moment's hesitation. His great anxiety is, if the expression be permissible, to preserve the human element in God, and he is scandalised by the tendency of the deist theory to identify God with nature. Thus he complains that Tindal makes rewards and punishments the 'inseparable attendants of virtuous and vicious actions,' so that, as he pathetically adds, 'I don't see that he leaves God anything to do in the matter at all.'[3] The Revealer is in danger of becoming superfluous as well as the revelation. Tindal would leave men 'only and wholly to the natural effects of

[1] Leland's Answer to Tindal, i. 34.
[2] Ib. i. 147.
[3] Ib. i. 234.

their own actions, and thus, under the pretence of ascribing more to God as a being of infinite power than to any earthly governors, he allows him far less.' God may not like earthly kings confer rewards and inflict punishments; and yet, if the necessity of such penalties for the restraint of mankind is felt by human lawgivers, 'why may not God do it as well as they?'

62. Evidently, the worthy Leland was perplexed by that ambiguity as to the meaning of 'natural,' which Butler cleared up with his usual acuteness. His conception of the universe, though never distinctly realised, was that of a vast machinery worked by invariable laws, which are vaguely described as the 'inherent nature of things,' with an Omnipotent Ruler promulgating supplementary laws to fill up the weak places of the system; and, though this ruler might be declared in words to be far above human comprehension, human precedents are more or less applicable to his actions. After proving, for example, to his own satisfaction, that the forgiveness of sinners on repentance—even if we could test the sincerity of the repentance—would offer an encouragement to crime, he asks, 'Can any reason be assigned why such a constitution, which would be foolish and pernicious in a human government, would be wise and proper in the Divine?'[1] The difficulty of supposing that God will punish the repentant sinner is met by the assertion that 'all good governments oblige persons in many cases to prosecute those who have injured them, and that, as is often the case, notwithstanding their repentance.'[2] Sometimes the analogy seems to be pushed still further. 'It is nothing to the purpose,' says Leland, in answering one of Tindal's arguments, 'whether sin can do God any real hurt. If not, no thanks to the sinner, for the natural tendency of sin is to make God unhappy, if he were capable of being so; it is a striking at his authority and laws, and if it cannot hurt his being, it' (that is, the incapacity to hurt him) 'is owing to the infinite perfections of his being.'[3] It is a kind of constructive levying of war against our Maker, though no actual injury is intended to his person. Leland appears to think that, as sin is harmless against God 'only on account of the transcendent

[1] Leland, i. 138. [2] Ib. i. 159. [3] Ib. i. 213.

excellency of his nature,' it would be hard that for that very reason the Almighty should be placed in a worse legal position. In reply to the further argument that God cannot take pleasure in punishment as such, Leland admits that he cannot delight in it as tending to make men miserable, but argues that he may delight in it as it vindicates his rights and tends to the preservation of order and authority; 'in a word, as it is acting worthy of himself, which can't but yield complacency and delight to the best of Beings.'[1] To talk of an increase to God's 'essential felicity'[2] would be blasphemous; but the use of the word complacency somehow evades the difficulty. By such means Leland maintains enough anthropomorphism in his religion to make things comfortable. The Ruler of the universe retires into a cloud of mystery when his actions are questionable, and steps forward to claim our admiration when they are thoroughly constitutional. Controversy conducted on these principles becomes a rather unedifying game at fast and loose. Each side can slip out of every difficulty, and is unable really to pin down his antagonist. When Tindal urges that the ceremonial law of the Jews tended to encourage superstition, Leland replies that it was a gracious condescension to human weakness, intended to exclude grosser superstition. The argument consists essentially in calling the same thing by different names. How determine whether a given cause of conduct is a gracious condescension or an unworthy compliance in a Being whose motives are confessedly altogether beyond our scrutiny?

63. Foster, Leland, Conybeare, and the like, give us the prevailing commonplaces of the time. They represent the regular jogtrot of controversy. To us the whole argument has become singularly lifeless. The combatants seem to be engaged in a fencing-match, rather than in a life and death struggle with pointed weapons. To each thrust there is a recognised parry, and we are almost amazed at the gravity with which the recognised parade of action is carried through. Is it a struggle for all that is dearest to the heart of man, or a mere sham-fight in which the best performers are to be rewarded with bishoprics and deaneries, rather for dexterity than for earnestness? Part of this impression is due to the change in

[1] Leland, i. 217. [2] Ib. i. 210.

our point of view, which makes the whole controversy unreal; part to the singular resemblance between Christians and deists, which causes us to wonder that so much indignation should be wasted on so trifling a matter; and part, it must be added, to the genuine unadulterated dullness of most of the writers. It is with comfort we turn to a disputant to whom none of these remarks are applicable. The question raised by such books as Leland's is how such writing can ever have been popular. The question raised by those of William Law, is how so vigorous a master of English and of reasoning should have sunk into such complete oblivion. The explanation would apparently be that he was too little in harmony with his age to be understood during his lifetime, and was yet too much affected by contemporary influences to do full justice to his powers. A Platonist in an Aristotelian atmosphere can no more flourish than an Alpine plant transplanted to the lowlands. He suffers doubly; his stature is stunted, and he is not appreciated by his neighbours. Law's attack upon Tindal seems to have excited less attention at the time, but it is incomparably more vigorous in tone than those through which we have been wearily plodding. Here, at last, we are face to face with a man who believes what he says, who is fighting for what he loves, and striking at the heart, instead of going through the recognised dumb-show of argument; who despises vamped-up repetitions of second-hand eloquence, and writes with the freedom of a man thoroughly at home in his own doctrines, and with the force, brilliance, and terseness of a clear-headed reasoner. Instead of half-yielding Tindal's assumptions, and then half-withdrawing his concessions, he attacks the central position of his adversary. Samson-like, he would pull down the pillar on which the whole structure rests, though, like Samson, he runs some risk of being crushed in the ruins.

64. Law really feels, what, though verbally acknowledged, was never adequately realised by his contemporaries, that God is greater than man. The fundamental assumption of Tindal's book, that human reason is sufficient to discover what God requires us to know, savours, in Law's opinion, of devilish pride. The 'fitness of things,' says Tindal, must be the sole rule of God's actions. Yes! replies Law; but the true

inference is fatal to your argument. Of God's nature, and consequently of the mode in which God acts, we can know nothing. Hence 'it is certain that the rule by which he acts must in many instances be entirely inconceivable by us, so as not to be known at all, and in no instances fully known or entirely comprehended.'[1] Tindal 'proves all to be plain, because God is to govern us according to something that is not plain, according to his own incomprehensible nature.'[2] What right have we petty creatures to lay down rules for God Almighty, to determine how far he shall go, and on what terms he shall deal with us? Our own form, our position in this world, our sufferings, and our happiness, are totally inexplicable by reference to the 'fitness of things;' and do we presume to complain of mysteries in revelation, when the whole universe is wrapped in inscrutable mystery? We may indeed perceive, more or less plainly, the reasonableness of some at least of our duties.[3] Law does not care to indulge in Leland's petty quibblings at the completeness of the natural law; and to him religion means, not the knowledge of a certain list of rules, but the knowledge of the relations of man to God, and of the means by which we may purify our spiritual nature. On such high matters our reason is helpless, except to receive in profoundest humility the revelations which God vouchsafes. We have as much right, he says, 'to appeal to hunger and thirst and sensual pleasure, to tell us how our souls shall live in the beatific presence of God, as to appeal to our reason and logic to demonstrate how sin is to be atoned, or the soul altered, prepared, and purified for future happiness.'[4] 'A man who rejects the atonement as needless because he cannot prove it to be necessary,' is as 'extravagant as he that should deny that God created him by his only Son, because he did not remember it.'[5] Our memory is as good a faculty in the one case as our reason in the other. Our intellects are as incapable of really apprehending such mysteries as our senses of perceiving an angel; they can only be made known to us so far as to become occasions of our 'faith, humility, adoration, and pious resignation to the divine wisdom and goodness.'[6]

[1] Law's Works, vol. ii. 'The Case of Reason,' &c., p. 7.
[2] Ib. p. 20.
[3] Ib. p. 7.
[4] Ib. p. 28.
[5] Ib. p. 29.
[6] Ib. p. 36.

65. But Law's objections cut still deeper. He strikes at the very root of the doctrine which Tindal had inherited from Clarke. As befits a man thus prostrating himself in awful reverence before the ineffable mysteries of the Divine nature, he utterly repudiates that strange colourless metaphysical idol which Tindal had erected in the place of, or perhaps above, the Almighty. He has admitted the 'fitness of things' to be the rule of God's actions as implying that his own nature must be the rule of his actions; but whereas Tindal and others mean by this doctrine 'I know not what eternal, immutable reasons and relations of things, independent of any being, and which are a common rule and law of God and man, I entirely declare against it, as an erroneous and groundless opinion.'[1] God is the ultimate cause of everything; to find a cause for his wisdom and goodness is as preposterous as to assign a cause for his existence. To derive his wisdom and goodness 'from the directions he receives from the relations of things,'[2] is as absurd as to found his knowledge on sensation and reflection. To say that there must be some reason why God's will should be determined in one way rather than another is to say that there must be something infinite independently of him. 'Dare anyone say,' asks Tindal, 'that God's laws are not founded on the eternal reason of things?'[3] 'I dare say it,' replies Law, 'with the same assurance that as his existence is not founded on the eternal existence of things; and that it is the same extravagance to say that God's laws are founded on the eternal reasons of things as to say that his power is founded on the eternal capacities of things.'[4] All moral duties begin with the existence of moral creatures, and depend on the sole will of God. The 'absolute independent fitnesses of actions,' and all the rest of it, are 'vain abstractions and philosophical jargon, serving no ends of morality, but only helping people to wrangle and dispute away that sincere obedience to God, which is their only happiness.'[5] In one sense, God, as the foundation of all things, is an arbitrary Being, 'but his own will is wisdom, and wisdom is his will. His goodness is arbitrary, and his arbitrariness is goodness.'[6] Perhaps there

[1] Law's Works, p. 42.
[2] Ib. p. 45.
[3] Tindal, p. 385.
[4] Law's Works, p. 47.
[5] Ib. p. 57.
[6] Ib. p. 60.

is in this a touch of the future mystic, but this is the fundamental difference between Law and the deists. Are we to conceive of the universe as governed by a body of fixed laws, capable of accurate investigation by quasi-mathematical methods, or as dependent everywhere and always on a living God, inscrutable and ineffably mysterious, yet revealing himself dimly, to the human understanding, and the source of all light, life and happiness? The human reason, which was capable, according to Tindal, of weighing and measuring all things, is with Law merely the power which fits us to be the recipients of revelation. Though our only possible guide, its guidance is only sufficient to inculcate obedience to a higher teacher. Nothing is our own, but 'a bare capacity to be instructed;'[1] we are as easily trained to vice as to virtue; as liable to be Hottentots amongst the Hottentots, as Christian among the Christians. Though philosophy may reach a kind of 'after knowledge,'[2] confirmatory of the truths learned from authority, we are all but 'a kind of foolish helpless animals, till education and experience have revealed to us the wisdom and knowledge of our fellow-creatures;'[3] and we think ourselves too wise to be capable of enlightenment by God Almighty! Tindal had endeavoured—unphilosophically enough—to reconcile his abstract theories about the light of nature with the palpable fact that it throws in the concrete so very flickering and uncertain a glimmer upon the world, by talking about the influence of education, and the imposture of priests. Law tears this flimsy fallacy to rags. This whole *a priori* method of proving what human nature ought to be, is as childish as it would be to throw aside history in order to give a truer account of the life of Alexander.[4] And the expedient for saddling all the errors of men upon priests is as wise as to attribute all the disease of the world to men's having been governed by physicians.[5] If all men had a perfect power, as Tindal argues that they ought to have, for detecting imposture, how do impostures flourish? If a man steadily bought brass for gold, would you say that his mistake was not owing to his defective knowledge, but to the lies of those who dealt with him? Flushed by his victory, Law proceeds to deal harder measure

[1] Law, p. 110.
[2] Ib. p. 112.
[3] Ib. p. 113.
[4] Ib. p. 119.
[5] Ib. p. 123.

to reason than can be fairly charged upon that unlucky faculty. By a rather doubtful logic, he credits it with 'all the mutability of our tempers, the disorders of our passions, the corruptions of our hearts, all the reveries of the imagination, all the contradictions and absurdities that are to be found in human life.'[1]

66. Without following him into this question, it is observable that in much of his argument Law might have been accompanied by Hume. Depreciation of reason leads more naturally to universal scepticism than to implicit faith. Law grudgingly admits the existence of some feeble fragment of verifying faculty; he permits us to say that some things are worthy or not worthy to be ascribed to God;[2] but he has scarcely left reason enough even to serve as ballast. Tindal had remarked that a blind submission would put all religions on the same footing; for, 'without judging of a religion by its internal marks, there's nothing but miracles to plead,'[3] and in regard to miracles he quotes significantly the Greek proverb: *θαύματα μώροις*. Law does not shrink from accepting this conclusion. He declares that a revelation is to be received as divine, not on account of its 'internal excellence, or because we judge it to be worthy of God, but because God has declared it to be his in as plain and undeniable manner as he has declared creation and providence to be his.'[4] Tindal's argument, he says, leads to atheism;[5] for if reason may reject the divine origin of a revelation which does not square with its teaching, it may reject on precisely similar grounds the divine origin of the creation. This statement anticipates Butler's argument.[6] Law applies it to justify the avowal that he appeals to the miracles and prophecies as a sufficient proof of Christianity. 'Though,' he says, 'miracles cannot prove false to be true, or good to be bad, yet they may prove that we ought to receive such doctrines both as true and good, which we could not know to be true and good without such miracles.'[7] To such arguments it had been frequently replied that miracles

[1] Law, p. 130. [2] Ib. p. 77. [3] 'Christianity,' &c., p. 169.
[4] Law, p. 80. [5] Ib. p. 87.
[6] 'He who denies the Scripture to have been from God on account of these difficulties may for the very same reason deny the world to have been formed by him' (Butler's 'Analogy,' Introduction).
[7] Law, p. 91.

might be diabolic as well as angelic. Law endeavours to show that, although such a case might be put hypothetically, yet there might also be miracles, which we might ascribe to divine power as certainly as we may ascribe creation generally to a divine origin. Some trivial instances to the contrary might be alleged, as in the case of the Egyptian miracles; but the case of miraculous agency exerted in proof of evil doctrines had never occurred in practice, and is just as absurd a supposition as to imagine natural creatures, created of a wicked nature, in order to be 'of service to the devil.'[1] The divine revelations were, in his opinion, marked as clearly on the face of nature as the divine origin of the world. Law changed his attitude at a later period for significant reasons. At present we need only remark that his argument, vigorous as it was, seemed to have attracted little contemporary notice.

## V. THE DECAY OF DEISM.

67. The controversy excited by Tindal rapidly died away. Though feeble echoes of the argument are to be found at a later period, and though it may be said, in a wider sense, that Tindal was a forerunner of modern developments of rationalism, the discussion in the same terms of the issues raised scarcely survived its author. Two writers, indeed, of inferior note carried on the deist succession. Their position was substantially identical with Tindal's, and a brief notice will sufficiently indicate their character. Thomas Chubb has long been little more than a name, though the name was frequently used to communicate a certain plebeian flavour to catalogues of contemptible deists. He was the least educated, indeed, of the whole race. The son of a maltster near Salisbury, he was early apprenticed to a tallow-chandler, and, except for a brief period, sold, though we are told that he did not make, candles to the end of his life. The exception to his tallow-chandling was a short residence with Sir Joseph Jekyll, in whose family he appears to have held an ambiguous position, partly as servant and partly as literary plaything. This honour was due to the publication of his first treatise,

[1] Law, p. 98.

which excited some attention, and made him, like poor Stephen Duck, the poet, a nine days' wonder. Pope mentions him in a letter to Gay as a 'wonderful phenomenon of Wiltshire,' and says that he has read his volume with admiration. Chubb, however, seems to have been a sensible man, and refusing some offers of patronage, retired to his candles, and made a comfortable competence. He deserves the praise of Malthusians; for he tells us that he never married, thinking it wrong to introduce a family into the world without a prospect of maintaining them. The proverb about Providence filling the mouths which it sent seemed to him to be opposed to the teaching of experience.[1] He sensibly stuck to his trade, and died at Salisbury in 1747, in his sixty-eighth year.

68. Chubb's literary qualifications were of the smallest. He knew neither Latin nor Greek, and occasionally avows his ignorance with amusing simplicity.[2] He appears, however, to have been a man of considerable natural ability; and in many of his tracts exhibits a logical faculty which, guided by better training, might have made him a formidable antagonist.[3] Fed upon mere crumbs of second-hand philosophy, and with little more learning than could be gained by a careful study of the English Bible, he was unable to make any distinct impression upon the world. Though loaded by his few critics with the stock charges of want of candour and of reverence, his writings show a very calm and honest intellect. There is little bitterness in his attacks upon the established faith; and his arguments are fairly, though seldom vigorously, stated. He belonged to a little debating society at Salisbury, which discussed the theology of the day, and acquired that kind of logical facility which is gained by practice in such an arena. His first tract, on the 'Supremacy of the Father,' was suggested by Whiston's preface to his 'Primitive Christianity Revived,' and published by that most amiable of heretics.[4] The world was astonished by a contribution to so abstruse a controversy from so humble a source; and Chubb became

[1] See biographical preface to Chubb's posthumous Works.

[2] *E.g.* 'True Gospel of Jesus Christ Vindicated,' p. 23.

[3] See, for example, the discourse on Miracles, where there are many shrewd remarks mixed with much crude argumentation.

[4] Preface, as above.

henceforth an assiduous writer. More than fifty tracts, filling eight small octavo volumes, are the product of his industry. The Arianism expounded in the first of his performances gradually deepened into Deism of the Tindal variety. His favourite doctrine, frequently repeated and enforced, is that true Christianity consists of three truths. The first is that conformity to the eternal rules which result from the 'natural and essential differences of things,' and nothing else, makes men acceptable to God; the second, that repentance and a change of life, and those alone, will secure God's mercy; and the third, that God will ultimately judge the world and give to every man according to his works.[1] That was, he thinks, the substance of Christ's teaching, and forms the whole of his final creed.

69. In defending these truths and attacking the accretions of dogmatic theology, by which they are overlaid, Chubb is led through the whole circle of deist argument. He attacks the doctrine of a special providence; he denies the demonstrative force of miracles; he denies the literal inspiration of the Scripture; and makes many of the ordinary criticisms upon the history both of the Old and New Testament; he appears to doubt, though he does not quite openly deny, the truth of Christ's resurrection. In another direction he is an ardent advocate of free-will—a doctrine which exposed him to the attacks of Jonathan Edwards; he repeats Toland's objection to mystery, and Tindal's objections to a positive and traditional religion. He disbelieves the eternity of punishment, and maintains, in opposition to Rutherford, the impossibility of reducing all human motives to selfishness. He is opposed to all sacerdotal claims, and to the union of Church and State. There are few, indeed, of the familiar deist arguments which may not be found in Chubb's tracts. The most complete summary of his opinions may found in the author's 'Farewell to his Readers,' published after his death. It was not, however, to be expected that much new light should be thrown upon such well-worn topics by an ignorant chandler at Salisbury; nor can it be said that Chubb added anything to the stock of thought. One little bit of satire may be

[1] *E.g.* 'The Author's Farewell,' posthumous Works, vol. ii. 82; and in many other places.

quoted before we take leave of him, which represents, perhaps, his liveliest mood. The veteran controversialist, Dr. Stebbing, had accused him of giving a false view of Christian morality by suppressing our Lord's advice to the young man to sell all he had and give it to the poor. Chubb replies that the text can hardly be meant literally, or the doctor's conduct would be very preposterous; who has not only added to those 'worldly advantages which arise to him from his two livings in Norfolk, and his being preacher at Gray's Inn, what arises to him from the Archdeaconry of Wilts, but he is also adding what arises from the chancellorship of the diocese of Sarum.'[1] The blow, let us hope, afforded Chubb a momentary consolation for the contempt of learned divines;[2] but, for the most part, he enjoyed the advantage, which may be some set-off against obscurity, of carrying on controversy with less than the usual infusion of personal animosity.

70. Another writer of this school—the last whom I shall mention—was Thomas Morgan, a physician, who published in 1737 the first volume of a book called the 'Moral Philosopher.' Two later volumes, published in 1739 and 1740, are answers to the attacks of the indefatigable Leland, and Chapman, an opponent of Middleton's. A fourth volume, published in 1741, called 'Physico-Theology,' attempted to set forth the moral creed of the so-called philosopher. Morgan was a disciple of Clarke's; he, like Chubb, had taken part in the Trinitarian controversy; and he speaks of Wollaston with extravagant admiration. The 'Religion of Nature Delineated' is, in his opinion, likely to outlive the whole Christian literature of the last seventeen centuries.[3] With such antecedents, it is not surprising that Morgan became a 'Christian deist;'[4] and defended, with little alteration, the thesis already supported by Tindal. The argument was becoming threadbare, and Morgan's book was received with an indifference due rather to the want of novelty than to the want of literary qualities equal to those of his predecessors. Once more we

[1] 'Ground and Foundation of Religion,' p. 139.

[2] Sherlock is said to have attacked Chubb's interpretation of certain passages in the Old Testament. See Works, v. 329. The reply, however, was anonymous, and the authorship is doubtful. Skelton, in the 'Ophiomaches,' and Taylor, in 'Ben Mordecai,' also attacked him. But his works were little noticed.

[3] 'Physico-Theology,' 224.

[4] 'Moral Philosopher,' i. 199.

have a demonstration of the absolute perfection of the religion of nature, and of the impossibility of adding to, as of abstracting from, it. Once more it is argued that miracles can only be an evidence to those who see them, and that neither the power of working miracles, nor of making correct predictions, can be proof of the truth of a doctrine ('the devil can work miracles'[1]). He rather sets aside than directly assails the truth of the internal evidences. Moral truth cannot depend on any series of external facts. The evidence of religion must be written upon man's heart, not in any written words or priestly traditions.

71. Enough and more than enough had been said upon these points. But Morgan's writings have one peculiarity which is symptomatic of the coming change. His book is more historical than his predecessors' writings, though some of the points raised by him are touched in Toland's later writings. He supports his doctrine by a distinct historical theory, a theory which is exceedingly crude, but which yet indicates a certain preoccupation with the problems investigated by a later school. He feels that it is necessary to account for the growth of that 'religion of the hierarchy' which, in his opinion, has overgrown the 'religion of nature.'[2] The theory which he elaborates savours, of course, of that purely negative attitude, that tendency to attribute all false religion to the intrigues of a designing priesthood, which is characteristic of the criticism of the day. Briefly stated, his doctrine appears to be that the natural religion which prevailed amongst all men in the golden age, before 'luxury, avarice, and ambition had taken place,'[3] was corrupted by a sort of fetichism, which saw in every natural event the direct interposition of divine power. Hence arose the superstition and enthusiasm which were turned to account by the early priests, and especially by Moses and Aaron. He derives from Prideaux's account of Mahommedan imposture, tests which equally convict Moses of worldly designs.[4] The Jews had caught in Egypt the contagion of sacerdotalism, and their subsequent history, as he argues at great length, is but a record of the evils flowing from the evil principles, which involved a low conception of

[1] 'Moral Philosopher,' i. 98.
[2] Ib. i. 94.
[3] Ib. iii. 94.
[4] Ib. iii. 111.

God, consecrated brutal ferocity under the name of religion, and enabled the priests to regulate superstition to their own profit. This 'most grossly ignorant, and most stupid people'[1] are in fact with Morgan, as with other deists, the typical embodiment of priest-ridden fanaticism. But his most distinctive theory is the position which he assigns to St. Paul —'the great freethinker of that age,' as he calls him, 'and the bold and brave defender of reason against authority.'[2] Christ, according to him, taught the pure religion of nature, and after the death of the Master, Paul defended the same doctrine against the fanaticism of the Judaizers led by Peter. He labours hard to relieve his favourite apostle from the imputation of teaching the doctrine of the Atonement, and represents him as maintaining that the Jewish law—so far as it differed from the law of nature—not only was not in future to be, but never had been, divinely imposed upon anyone. Unluckily persecution forced the more liberal Christians to coalesce with their Judaizing opponents,[3] and thus sacerdotalism broke out once more in the form of the Catholic hierarchy, whilst the true Christians, the adherents of the right of private judgment, were reviled as Gnostics and followers of Simon Magus.[4]

72. However crude the argument may be, it yet indicates a desire to regard the early history of Christianity from the historical point of view; and it illustrates the tendency of the whole controversy to pass from abstract reasoning to more definite issues of fact. This, as I shall directly remark, is characteristic of the time. Morgan's second and third volumes are almost entirely filled with familiar discussions as to Jewish history, and the morality of the chief Jewish heroes. In the 'Physico-Theology' he returns to the old argument from the law of nature, but bewilders himself with a futile attempt to prove the existence of God from the phenomena of light, and is wellnigh lost in the morasses of the free-will controversy. There it is quite needless to follow him. Of his chief antagonist, John Chapman, it is enough to say that he repeats the ordinary arguments with rather less than the ordinary vivacity.

[1] 'Moral Philosopher,' ii. 118.
[2] Ib. i. 71.
[3] Ib. i. 379, &c.
[4] Ib. i. 387.

73. We have passed the culminating point of the deist controversy. Its interest has palpably declined. Morgan found only a third-rate opponent in Chapman, and the industrious Leland had the rare pleasure of discovering almost virgin ground in his assault upon Chubb's posthumous tracts. Henceforth we hear little of constructive Deism—of the attempt, that is, to substitute for Christianity a pure body of abstract truths, reposing on metaphysical demonstration. If we enquire into the cause of this decay, we may dismiss the reply that it implied the clear logical triumph of the Christian apologists. The Christians, in fact, met the deists more than half way. The question really argued was not so much the truth or falsehood of the Christian revelation, as the utility of maintaining the Christian embodiment of deist doctrines. By the predominant school Christianity was defended, not as materially altering our conceptions of the universe, but as affording the only sufficient guarantee for a practical observance of the law of nature. The superficial character of the discussion is symptomatic of the shallowness of the convictions of many of the disputants. Though apparently sincere, they are arguing over corollaries rather than primary truths. None of the apologists, with one or two remarkable exceptions, attempt really to go to the bottom of the question, and to frame their beliefs into a general and harmonious theory. Content with puzzling their antagonists by retorting difficulties upon them, they do not really care to test the strength of their own case. The true cause of the decay of Deism is to be sought in its internal weakness. The creed was never really alive; it was not rooted in the deepest convictions, nor associated with the most powerful emotions of its adherents. The metaphysical deity was too cold and abstract a conception to excite much zeal in his worshippers. Clarke's philosophy was already antiquated when he tried to press it into the service of Christianity; and as the pioneers of speculation advanced in a different direction, the religious creed, divorced from active thought, died a natural death from internal decay, and hence followed a marked peculiarity of the whole controversy. The external evidences gradually assumed more prominence than the internal, and in the next generation the argument became almost exclusively historical.

74. The change followed from the very nature of the case. The argument of the Christian apologists had a strangely sceptical colouring. In their attack upon the religion of nature, their blows have a necessary reaction upon the foundations of their own faith. We may say, briefly, that Deism, whether of the Christian or extra-Christian variety, was assailable both in its method and in the dogmas attained by the method. The method involved the use of metaphysical arguments, daily falling into greater discredit, and which, even if unassailable, were scarcely intelligible to ordinary minds. If the difficulty of combining an historical with a metaphysical basis could be surmounted, it was impossible to found a really vigorous creed on a scholasticism so remote from popular modes of thought. The dogmatic teaching of Deism was equally feeble. The main article of the creed was expressed by Pope and Bolingbroke in the formula 'whatever is, is right.' This is the logical outcome of the doctrine that everything is natural, and that God is nature. But the doctrine when interpreted into concrete terms is either nugatory, or in hopeless conflict with facts. If it has any meaning, it amounts to a flimsy optimism. A purely optimistic creed always wants any real stamina ; for the great stimulant of religious emotions is a profound sense of the evils of human life. A placid assertion that everything is well, either empties words of all meaning, or is felt to be false by every real sufferer—that is, by everyone in the specially religious mood. It is a crutch which breaks whenever we wish to lean upon it. The most vigorous thinkers, of very opposite schools, assailed Deism from this side. Hume, denying the competency of the mind to frame theological theories, became systematically sceptical; Law, as we have seen, escaped from scepticism by accepting for a time the proof from the internal evidences, and ultimately found a safer refuge in mysticism ; Butler attacked rather the dogma than the method, and argued that the God of nature was not really the colourless and vaguely benevolent being of the deist heresies.

75. Each of these solutions, reached by the keenest intellects of the time, is distinctly sceptical in its bearing upon natural theology. Whatever the value of the positive conclusions reached by Butler or Law, their views harmonise with

the sceptical assault upon the theology of Clarke and Tindal. Not by that road, they declared, was a knowledge of divine things to be obtained, whatever other paths might be opened. The arguments used by inferior writers imply a feebler perception of the same fact. They feel the ground of pure reason hollow beneath their feet, and shift towards the easier proof from historical documents. They attack reason sparingly and tenderly, but yet they lower its claims sufficiently to show the need of a support from external evidence. Though not following Hume to the point of denying to the human intellect a capacity for passing the limits of experience, they yet urge that its conclusions require the corroboration of experience. Failing to take so wide a view as Butler, they are scarcely conscious of the broad objection to Deism, founded on the impossibility of making it square with the facts of the universe. But they show a dim appreciation of the truth by their constant use of what is in substance a corollary from that argument. To the deist complaint of the injustice and partiality of the Christian God, it is the established reply that the God revealed through nature has been equally partial and unjust. When fully developed, the argument would run somehow thus: The true God, said both Christians and deists, must be goodness and justice embodied. The God of the Bible, said the deists, is not perfectly good or just, and is therefore not the true God. The Christians did not reply by vindicating his moral character, but by arguing that we could not judge of it, and they retorted that the God revealed in nature was no more perfect than the God of the Bible. This was substantially to deny the competence of reason, and to appeal to the evidence of facts. In the narrow mode of conceiving of history characteristic of the time, the appeal to facts meant an appeal to the evidences of the truth of the biblical history. Deism, bound by such difficulties, was meanwhile decaying from within. From the beginning, too, it had included a purely sceptical element. Though Toland had fancied that the central citadel would be safe when the dogmatical outworks were destroyed, his assault really tended towards a repudiation, not only of the official 'mysteries,' but of the great mystery evolved in all theology. The other wing of

the deists, led by Collins, had taken a simply destructive tone; and thus the metaphysical religion of nature, growing weaker from within and from without, gradually sank into a secondary position, whilst the hostile thinkers met upon the definite and tangible issue of historical truth. The creed which troubled and threatened to supplant Christianity was disappearing; but it remained to be seen whether the fruits of the victory could be won by the Christians or the sceptics.

## *VI. CONCLUSION.*

76. A very remarkable commentary upon the whole controversy from this point of view is given in an anonymous pamphlet which appeared in 1742, called 'Christianity Not Founded on Argument.' Its author was afterwards known to be Henry Dodwell, son of the learned nonjuror, and brother to William Dodwell, who defended the orthodox faith against Middleton. He is said to have been 'a polite, humane, and benevolent man.' Certainly he was a man of no small ingenuity and literary power. The pamphlet is in some sense the ablest of all that were produced by the deists, and puts into a quaint shape the most incisive criticism upon the whole contemporary theology.

77. A creed may rest, it is said, upon intuition, upon authority, or upon rational demonstration. A scientific belief, it may be replied, rests upon all three. The belief, for example, in the truths of astronomy depends upon intuition, for its first truths are self-evident—whatever may be the psychological explanation of our spontaneous acceptance of them. It depends upon demonstration in so far as its remotest corollaries are connected with the first principles by an unbroken chain of argument; each link of which invites, and will bear the strictest examination. To the bulk of mankind, again, the truths rest upon authority, and upon the only authority which, in such matters, really deserves respect; namely, the agreement of qualified and independent reasoners. The aim of Clarke and his school had been to construct a theology possessing similar claims upon our faith. It had the fatal defect that each link of the argument, instead of commanding assent, provoked infinite controversies; and for the simple

reason that every stage of the argument was conducted in regions beyond the grasp of the human intellect, and where reason, therefore, instead of producing unity of sentiment, stultifies itself amidst inevitable antinomies. So far, therefore, from being entitled to demand assent, its advocates were bound to admit the legitimacy of the widest divergence of opinion. So long as logicians are radically opposed, they should admit that doubt, and not conviction, is the cardinal virtue ; or, at the very lowest, they must admit that they cannot challenge assent from the ignorant until the learned are agreed. That is the very first condition of all rational enquiry. Unluckily, the whole orthodox school, whilst admitting that faith should follow reason, continued to claim in practice that faith should precede reason. They dogmatised, whilst the very effort at demonstration proved that they still doubted. A belief in Christianity, however wide the interpretation which might be put upon that word, was still proclaimed as essential whilst they were labouring with doubtful success to lay the foundation of a creed. They could not admit that all creeds might be innocently held, or that doubt was pardonable. Even deists of the Tindal school maintained the necessity of some vague but dogmatic belief. Here was the inevitable contradiction which came more and more decisively to light as the controversy continued, and which tended more and more to destroy the authority of religion. Free thought was proved by actual experiment to lead to the widest difference of opinion. Toleration and doubt were the natural consequences, but the official defenders of Christianity still insisted upon the duty of absolute certainty. This is the point at which Dodwell struck with remarkable vigour ; and there can be little doubt that he was expressing the latent conclusion of many minds.

78. He proposes to establish the three propositions, that reason cannot be the principle of faith ; that the Bible does not represent it as such a principle ; and that the true principle is an inner and divine light. He urges, in the first place, the absurdity of imposing upon all mankind, the ignorant and the infants ; 'a faith built upon syllogisms.'[1] In a different case Butler's excellent 'Analogy' might incline him to believe ; but when regarded as the foundation of a universal system of

[1] 'Christianity Not Founded on Argument,' p. 24.

faith, such elaborate arguments only convince him 'that such a position can never be that necessary truth, which stands in need of such far-fetched apologies and laboured accounts to reconcile and explain it.'[1] Clarke's laboured productions have suggested doubts oftener than they have produced conviction.[2] Addison's arguments from history,[3] or the exponents of Daniel's prophecies[4] may convince the learned, but cannot justify a demand of assent from the vulgar. To permit reasoning, indeed, is to permit a variety of conclusions. Rational conclusions (to avoid absolute scepticism he should have said on theological matters) must always be precarious. 'For what reason has established, it is evident the same reason must have the power to repeal.'[5] A religion founded on such precarious evidence can never have the power to command our passions and to push men to martyrdom.[6] For such purposes we want more than the 'precarious conjecture of a fallible judge upon the traditional testimony of a fallible witness.'[7] To doubt is the necessary condition of a fair examination of evidence; though theologians begin by proscribing all doubt and demanding certainty from children. What more absurd than to say to all men: 'Judge whether you have time or not; judge whether you are judges or not; judge all for yourselves, and yet judge all alike?'[8] To command men to believe rationally is a contradiction in terms, unless the power of believing is communicated by him who commands. 'The seeing of sounds or the hearing of colours are illustrations far short of the nonsense of conscience in opinion upon any other principle.'[9]

79. Dodwell's ostensible proofs from Scripture, such as the statement that Christ did not argue, but 'taught as one having authority;' that his apostles laughed at philosophy and demanded implicit faith; that a desire for proofs was rebuked, and that Christ refused to work miracles before unbelievers, and others of a similar kind, are sufficiently conceivable. They cover, of course, some apparent insinuations against the credibility of the history. The most forcible argument, how-

[1] 'Christianity Not Founded on Argument,' p. 21.

[2] Ib. p. 81, and at p. 86 he makes a remark, already anticipated by Collins, that Boyle's lectures were a great cause of modern infidelity. Rather, they were a symptom.

[3] Dodwell, p. 18. [5] Ib. p. 26. [7] Ib. p. 31. [9] Ib. p. 64.

[4] Ib. p. 20. [6] Ib. p. 30. [8] Ib. p. 35.

ever, is an appeal to actual experience. He recommends his supposed correspondent to go to any assembly of the faithful, and declare ingenuously what is the secret of their belief. 'Is it possible that you will assert,' he asks, 'that this harmonious flock are thus altogether giving a rational assent to all these curious articles and profound theorems, when your experience in the meantime assures you that the generality of these unanimous confessors have never in their whole lives bestowed a single thought in a speculative way upon the truth or falsehood of that long train of propositions they so liberally avow?'

80. In fact, all religion, historically speaking, has depended, and must depend for the masses of mankind, upon authority. A creed built on elaborate syllogisms is a creed with a 'perhaps' in it, and no such creed can command men's emotions. From the difficulty thus presented there were two modes of escape for believers in supernaturalism. One is the appeal to arbitrary authority, or, in other words, the abnegation of reason. Dodwell notices this ironically. The attempt of men who advocate free thought to prescribe the limits of thought, and to ask us to accept innumerable statements about the inconceivable, is the height of absurdity. 'The men of Rome, the most notorious of idolaters, shall rise up in the judgment (of all considering persons) against this generation and condemn it; for they invented but the one absurdity of infallibility, and behold, a greater absurdity than infallibility is here.' The other escape is by the doctrine of an internal light, which Dodwell ostensibly accepts. Unanimity, he concludes, can be reached on no other method than that of 'a constant and particular revelation imparted separately and supernaturally to every individual.'[1] This and his argument that, as miracles are useless except to the eyewitness, and therefore, if once necessary must be always necessary, we must have a constant miraculous guide, may remind us of the conclusion of Hume's celebrated Essay upon Miracles. The great sceptic there remarks that Christianity 'not only was at first attended with miracles, but even at this day cannot be believed by any reasonable person without one. Mere reason is insufficient to convince us of its veracity. And

[1] Dodwell, p. 110.

whoever is moved by faith to assent to it is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person which subverts all the principles of his understanding, and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to reason and experience.' Dodwell's irony, however, seems to have puzzled some worthy Christians of mystical tendencies.[1]

81. Here, then, is the sceptical solution which resulted in one direction from all the argumentation of the preceding half-century. The good orthodox apologists, Doddridge and the indefatigable Leland, replied to Dodwell. They tried to weaken the force of his arguments by declaring that intellectual error results from evil affections,[2] by urging that the vulgar can understand evidence,[3] and by relaxing the terms of salvation.[4] Doddridge holds that the evidences are clear enough to be explained to a child of fourteen or fifteen,[5] and Benson holds that they are intelligible to a ploughman.[6] Doddridge adds that he will not believe that any good deist in a Protestant country ever died an infidel, inasmuch as he has stronger evidence of the truth of Christianity than of the virtue of its opponents.[7] These writers, in fact, accept the position to which Dodwell sought to drive them, and admit its consequences with perfect simplicity. Dodwell was putting into another form the demand often suggested by the deists, that a religion which insists upon universal obedience should rest upon evidence as clear as the sun in heaven. The attempts to show the reasonableness of Christianity (and Benson, it may be noticed, revived at the end of the discussion the title which Locke had employed at its opening) helped to strengthen rather than to satisfy the demand. It became plainer by every addition to the controversy that the reasoning on which Christianity was to be supported was altogether too elaborate to be intelligible to the ordinary individual. I need only remark, in passing, that Dodwell's argument commonly illustrates the way in which this conviction tended to strengthen Methodism in one direction, as it has since strengthened the Catholic reaction. Its tendency

[1] See Byrom's 'Journal,' ii. 362.
[2] Leland's 'Remarks,' letter i. 23.
[3] Ib. 55.
[4] Ib. 69.
[5] Doddridge, Works, i. 479.
[6] Benson, 'Reasonableness of the Christian Religion,' p. 145.
[7] Doddridge, p. 539.

in the direction of pure doubt was manifested in England chiefly in encouraging a kind of indolent scepticism, which becomes a characteristic of the next half-century.

82. Yet one more writer of high reputation must be reckoned among the deist writers. The controversial storm, indeed, had been succeeded by the singular calm which, in the middle of the eighteenth century, pervaded the world of thought as well as the world of politics. For a moment, though only for a moment, people were scandalised as the 'beggarly Scotchman,' Mallet, discharged the 'blunderbuss against religion and morality' which had been loaded by Bolingbroke.[1] The shot was not fired till the favourable moment had long passed, though it must have been long prepared. Bolingbroke began his philosophical studies, as he tells us, at the age of forty;[2] and his first composition professes to be the substance of letters written to a M. de Pouilly, about 1720. He pursued his enquiries during his subsequent years of embittered retirement; and was supposed to have inspired Pope's 'Essay on Man.' There are, indeed, many coincidences between the poem and Bolingbroke's fragmentary writings. But as the only question raised about Pope's verses by anybody, except Warburton, was whether the poetry was good enough to float the bad philosophy, it was hardly to be supposed that the philosophy without the poetry would be tolerable. In fact, this tremendous counterblast for theologians completely missed its aim. It excited little notice, except from Warburton, whose orthodox imagination was here warmed by personal antipathy, and from the inevitable Leland. The failure was doubtless due in part to the general flagging of interest; but also in great measure to the windy and incoherent nature of the so-called philosophy. Even the external polish of style repels us, like the courtly manner of some palpably insincere diplomatist. And then Bolingbroke is monstrously diffuse; he is rhetorical where he ought to be logical; he repeats himself incessantly, and contradicts himself nearly as often; no solid ground of thought can be found in this shifting quagmire of speculation, where the one genuine ingredient seems to be an indiscriminate hatred of all philo-

[1] Boswell, ann. 1754. [2] Works, iii. 183. Bolingbroke was born in 1678.

sophers and divines. Warburton rates him soundly for his love of Billingsgate ;[1] and Warburton himself is the only writer of the time who could outrail him. But Bolingbroke is more or less trammelled by his high-stepping parliamentary pomposity, where Warburton discards his gown and throws dirt with a will. Yet Bolingbroke succeeds in calling everybody who differs from him fool, knave, or madman. All who thought that anything could be known of the spirit as distinct from the body are 'pneumatical madmen.'[2] Heathen philosophers and platonising Christians were alike mad or doting.[3] The study of metaphysics is generally described as delirium, and all who believe in ontology are 'learned lunatics.'[4] Descartes was mad whenever he indulged in *a priori* reasoning ; and so are those who follow his example.[5] Leibnitz was 'one of the vainest and most chimerical men that ever got a name in philosophy.'[6] Clarke, whom he specially hates, is an empty bully.[7] Wollaston ought to be under Monroe, the mad-doctor.[8] Ancient philosophers and divines fare no better. Whenever Plato, the great corrupter of Christianity, leaves the 'false sublime, he sinks down, and lower no writer can sink, into a tedious socratical irony, into certain flimsy hypothetical reasonings that prove nothing, and into allusions that are mere vulgarisms, and that neither explain nor enforce anything that ought to be explained or enforced ;'[9] whilst his commentators are dull or mad.[10] When Paul's teaching is intelligible it is 'often absurd, or profane, or trifling.'[11] His doctrine of predestination is impious and abominable ; unless some strained interpretation can be allowed under cover of 'the style of a writer, the least precise and clear that ever writ.'[12] It is impossible to read Moses's account of the creation 'without feeling contempt for him as a philosopher and horror as a divine.'[13] The only exceptions to these sweeping censures are Bacon and Locke, whose philosophy he takes to be favourable to his own views, and Berkeley, who is apparently treated with tenderness on account of his personal relations to Swift, Pope, and himself.

[1] Warburton, xii. 108.
[2] Bolingbroke, iv. 474.
[3] Ib. iv. 480.
[4] Ib. v. 374.
[5] Ib. iv. 139.
[6] Ib. iii. 329.
[7] Ib. v. 293.
[8] Ib. iii. 518.
[9] Ib. iv. 141.
[10] Ib. iv. 355.
[11] Ib. iv. 331.
[12] Ib. iv. 510.
[13] Ib. iii. 233.

83. Language of this kind in a modern writer could mean nothing but sheer intellectual insensibility; and we must admit that it excludes the hypothesis that Bolingbroke had any true metaphysical acuteness. Indeed, he contradicts himself almost as often as he contradicts Leibnitz. But to understand how a man in Bolingbroke's position—a man, that is, whose social and political position had brought him into contact with the acutest intellects of his time—could be guilty of this kind of philosophical boorishness, we must take two reflections into account. One is that Bolingbroke seems to have brought into philosophy the habits which he had acquired in politics. He denounces Clarke as he denounced Walpole in an age when it was thought decent to pelt an antagonist with abuse scarcely less offensive than the material missiles of the pillory. The metaphysicians merely took the place of the Ministry, and no imputations were too gross to be hurled at them. And, in the next place, this hatred of the *a priori* school is characteristic of the time, and is the most significant peculiarity of Bolingbroke's writings. Bolingbroke, however flimsy his reasoning and gross his language, was no fool. He had the instinct of a party leader, and could catch the prevailing tone of sentiment even when he was quite unable to appreciate its deeper sources. And in this virulent assault upon Platonism and theology, upon Cudworth, upon Descartes, Malebranche, and Leibnitz, upon Clarke and Wollaston, and upon all who were tainted by the 'metaphysical delirium,' he is, in fact, only expressing the vehement reaction against the expiring philosophy which was expressed in a thousand keen epigrams by his pupil Voltaire. His arguments are feeble and inconsistent; but he aims them at a school whose pretensions to dominion had excited a widespread reaction. And as illustrating the vehemence of this rather vague sceptical tendency, Bolingbroke gives an interesting indication of the general current of thought, though he cannot be regarded as determining its direction.

84. It would be hopeless to give any coherent account of that 'first philosophy' of which he professed to be a teacher; but his relation to contemporary speculation may be briefly indicated. Bolingbroke, in the first place, was a theist,

and he even insists upon the clearness and all-sufficiency of the law of nature in language which recalls Clarke and Tindal. But he was a theist on a plan of his own. He denies the possibility of ontology as vehemently as he asserts the necessity of theology. He declares that 'human knowledge is relative and not absolute;'[1] but he is opposed to the Atheism (as he holds it to be) of Collins[2] as much as to the theology of Clarke. His Theism, then, rests upon a purely empirical basis. His letters to Pouilly are a strange attempt to prove the existence of God from the consent of all tradition to the fact that the world had a beginning; and he flounders painfully in the attempt to prove that all particular traditions, and especially the Mosaic, are false, whilst asserting that their testimony to this fact is trustworthy. The first men, so this sceptic affects to believe, may have actually detected the Divine Artificer at work in forming some other animals in different countries.[3] He afterwards explicitly abandons this ingenious theory.[4] He thinks that the first men were polytheists, or, perhaps, as he has learnt from Cudworth, theists and polytheists at once.[5] There are glimpses here and there of a more genuine historical conception; but he is, of course, blind to anything like the modern view of evolution. From the relativity of knowledge he infers the uncertainty of all science;[6] and, like the other freethinkers of the time, is a disbeliever in progress, holding that all our systems go through cycles 'from generation to corruption, and from corruption to generation.'[7] The transference of a belief in progress from believers to the infidels is, as already remarked, a characteristic symptom.

85. The God of empirical philosophy must be Paley's Almighty Watchmaker,[8] and Bolingbroke anticipates the illustration.[9] Though, with characteristic inconsistency, he gives a proof identical with that of Clarke,[10] it is upon the

[1] Bolingbroke, iii. 382. [2] Ib. v. 331.

[3] Ib. iii. 243. E. Law argues in the same way that the first men could prove their origin by certain physical peculiarities ('Theory of Religion,' p. 2).

[4] Ib. iii. 259. [5] Ib. iv. 19, 191, 231. [6] Ib. iii. 391.

[7] Ib. iv. 236. See this doctrine attacked by Law ('Theory of Religion,' p. 216).

[8] See this and the following curiously exemplified in Mr. Mill's 'Essay on Theism.'

[9] Bolingbroke, iii. 188. [10] Ib. iii. 354.

argument from design that he lays the chief stress, and it is to 'Ray, Derham, and Nieuentyt,'[1] and other forerunners of Paley, that he refers his disciple for the most conclusive proofs of the divine power and wisdom. His theism, such as it is, leads him to two main doctrines, frequently enforced, and standing out with some consistency amidst the vague topics of his declamations. They deserve a brief notice, for they give whatever teaching is to be found in his pages.

86. His favourite assertion is the existence of a tacit confederacy between atheists and divines. It is connected with a peculiar doctrine as to the evidences of a divine ruler, which, though it shifts into varying shapes, has perhaps a certain meaning at bottom. His theory is that we can demonstrate the 'natural,' but not the 'moral,' attributes of God. We can recognise, that is, the power and wisdom, but not the goodness or justice, of the Deity. We should receive 'ideas of wisdom and power' from God's works, even if 'human actions gave us none;' but we derive our 'first and strongest impressions of benevolence, justice, and other moral virtues,'[2] exclusively from reflections upon ourselves and our neighbours. The doctrine thus stated is perhaps a natural conclusion from an empirical theology. Granting that intelligence and strength is implied in the contrivance of living organisms, it has been said by much keener logicians than Bolingbroke, and especially by Hume, that the evidences for divine morality are much feebler. Granting that God has put us together, we may hold that he has cared little for our happiness, and nothing for apportioning happiness to virtue. Bolingbroke, however, did not hold this view with any consistency. At times he seems to be arguing, after the fashion of Browne and King, that our ignorance of the divine essence necessarily limits our knowledge of his attributes. We cannot attain a knowledge of 'his manner of being, or his manner of producing those effects which give us ideas of wisdom and power, and as little, or less if possible, can we rise from our moral obligations to his supposed moral attributes.'[3] He attacks again the inevitable anthropomorphism of divines who 'make God after the image of man.' God, he says else-

[1] Bolingbroke, v. 339. [2] Ib. v. 88. [3] Ib. v. 81.

where, 'is, in their notion of him, nothing but an infinite man.'[1] But he will not lose the advantage of asserting the necessary goodness of God. He proceeds at once to affirm that all that God does is great and good in itself, 'though it does not appear such in every instance conformably to our ideas of justice and goodness.'[2] The difference is only that the physical attributes are in their nature more glaring and less equivocal.'[3] When he is anxious to assert the goodness of God against divines, he regards the moral attributes as 'absorbed in the wisdom,' or as being 'modifications of this physical attribute.'[4] He wishes, in fact, to establish the goodness of God sufficiently to justify his favourite optimism,[5] and yet to be able to denounce the divines for presuming to identify human and divine attributes.

87. This radical inconsistency pervades Bolingbroke's arguments, and gives Warburton a very fair triumph. Bolingbroke's views are evidently determined more by his desire to say something unpleasant to his immediate opponent, than by any respect for logic. His supposed confederacy between divines and atheists might be interpreted as meaning that he reviles atheists to save his character, and divines to gratify his spite. Warburton's reply is simple and plausible. The whole of this 'chimerical conspiracy,' he says, 'comes to this: that divines and atheists hold a principle in common, but in common too with all the rest of mankind—namely, that there are irregularities in the distribution of moral good and evil.'[6] To Warburton an argument was an argument; he regarded it as a weapon which depended upon the hand that wielded it, and not as the announcement of a truth which might recoil upon the discoverer. He held, therefore, that divines would be exonerated if they levelled their reasoning at deists, whatever might be its legitimate application. The fact is, that Bolingbroke had really a meaning, though he blundered egregiously in explaining it. Bolingbroke might have carried to its logical conclusion his own denial of the possibility of proving the moral attributes of God. He might then have said, with some justice, to the divines: The facts of the

[1] Bolingbroke, v. 310. [2] Ib. v. 312. [3] Ib. v. 312.
[4] Ib. v. 335. [5] Ib. v. 392.
[6] Warburton, 'Works,' xii. 113.

universe do not exhibit the goodness of God ; you admit, and even assert, the truth yourselves when, like Wollaston, you declare the world to be a scene of misery ; or, like Butler, declare that God punishes the innocent for the guilty ; and, therefore, you are mere hypocrites when you turn round and declare that the God who has made this wretched world and punished its best inhabitants, is at once omnipotent and infinitely benevolent. In your haste to attack the deists, you have cut away the foundations of your own creed. Or, he might have asserted with the deists, that the universe proved the infinite goodness of God. In that case he might have consistently charged the divines with blasphemy for the dark picture which they had devised of the all-perfect Creator. He might have fairly pointed out the unworthiness of the moral character attributed to the Supreme Being in both Testaments. 'The God of the Old Testament,' he says in fact, 'rewards and punishes visibly and signally here ; he terrifies often by his anger, he reforms sometimes. The God of the New makes little difference here between those whom he approves and those whom he disapproves ; so little, that he is charged with injustice for it ; but he lies in wait to punish the latter hereafter with unrelenting vengeance and eternal torments when it is too late to terrify, because it is too late to reform.' [1] Bolingbroke tried to take both lines at once ; and, therefore, half asserts and half denies the goodness of God, and declares the perfection of the universe, whilst denying the legitimate inference from his assertion.

88. The inconsistency is plain enough, and its cause is obvious. Bolingbroke is a mere partisan disguising himself in the dress of a philosopher ; and yet his very inconsistency is characteristic of an age of growing scepticism. Where were men to turn? Follow the deists, and you are landed in an optimism contradicted by every fact before your eyes ; follow the divines, and whilst they will in words ascribe the utmost perfection to their Deity, they will attack the works of his hands, pronounce human nature to be corrupt, and the world a scene of misery, and make their Deity reflect the worst human passions of cruelty and vindictiveness. Where were men bewildered by pretentious philosophy and

[1] Bolingbroke, v. 533.

revolted by the dry husks of an effete theology to turn for comfort? The answer was, that they must learn first to examine facts; and we shall presently see where that attempt led them. We must first, however, follow the direct criticism by which the authority of the established creed had been weakened.

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# CHAPTER IV.

## CRITICAL DEISM.

### *I. INTRODUCTORY.*

1. AT the end of the seventeenth century, a serious criticism of the external evidences was scarcely in existence. What there was of grotesque and ignoble in the sacred records was hidden; whilst faith still burnt brightly in the reflected glow of sanctity. The absurdities, which at a later period edged the sarcasms of Voltaire, till now had either escaped notice or been easily converted into symbols of a spiritual meaning. It was not till that magical splendour began to fade that the worshippers rose from their knees, and, gazing coolly round them, made strange discoveries. The old worship first lost its spiritual meaning, and then men began to perceive that the shrines and the sacred images had their share of weakness and corruption. A discovery speedily followed, which Shaftesbury expressed in the formula, that ridicule was the test of truth. A hundred people could laugh at legends of talking asses and possessed swine, for one who could appreciate reasons why the doctrine of the Atonement should not satisfy the conscience of mankind, or the Christian type of morality be regarded as imperfect.

2. And thus, when the old foundations had been sapped by philosophic thinkers, and not till then, the argument descended to topics more level to the general comprehension, and took a less worthy tone, as it appealed to a lower audience. The deists bade for support as they gained courage, by exposing to popular contempt desecrated fragments of holy things which had once been hidden behind the veil of the temple. The use of such modes of controversy necessarily jars upon reverent minds. It is defensible only on the ground that ridicule is the most effective charm for laying the ghosts

of dead opinions. When a phantom dogma persists in haunting the living world, a laugh will cause it to vanish more rapidly than the keenest logical slashing. Sarcasm is the appropriate weapon against the pedantry of scholars, philosophers, or theologians; and thus it expresses the natural rebound of the minds that are just escaping from under the horrors of persecution. The pedant tries to maintain his superiority, no longer resting on physical force, by an attitude of excessive solemnity. The obvious retort is to laugh at him. 'Tis the persecuting spirit,' says Shaftesbury, 'that has raised the bantering one;' and the banter is effective in proportion to the hollowness of the pretensions opposed to it. The ridicule employed consists essentially in bringing into sharp contrast the faiths which men really hold with those which they only professed to hold; and the shock, however painful, may have been salutary. The reader of the deist controversies may indeed be inclined to suspect, at first sight, that the ridicule was often rather a substitute for reasoning than a supplement. Though the arguments on the internal evidence have become insipid, the most inadequate discussion of principles has some touch of perennial interest; for many of the current ideas have been rather transformed than extinguished; and some sparks of enduring truth are struck out in the collision. But an argument about facts, in which both sides are ignorant of the most important evidence, and unskilled in the true critical method, is painfully futile. The many books once instinct with fervid indignation and moving the hearts of all men can be read with languid curiosity. The issues are wrongly stated and insufficiently argued. No blow is struck on either side during the whole controversy to which the feeblest modern antagonist does not know the ordinary—perhaps satisfactory—reply. We can watch the assault and the defence without a single flush of excitement, or the sense that any important issue is at stake. And, therefore, an account of the controversy must, at first sight, appear to be a record of crude and superficial wrangling. And yet, whilst we smile at the errors, let us gratefully acknowledge the courage of the men, who, with little learning and insufficient ability, began to break down the ancient superstition. Nor let us be slow to acknowledge that the

defenders of the established order were animated for the most part, not by a cowardly fear of consequences, but by a genuine love for truth and for religion, as they conceived it. If the conceptions of these writers are cramped and their learning obsolete, they contrast advantageously with many of their descendants in the vigour and candour of their reasoning.

3. The countrymen and contemporaries of Bentley were not destitute of the critical faculty ; nor were they, it is probable, less acute, or even less learned, than their descendants. Their weakness was due to the ignorance of the true method of historical criticism, and yet more to the presence of certain preconceived impressions, and the absence of some of the great transforming ideas of more recent times. Their writings have, of course, the faults inseparable from vehement advocacy, and therefore from most controversy which is really in earnest. A truly judicial attitude was at that time impossible, even to the most impartial minds. Theologians were in a false position, though they did not even suspect the fact. They had imported the prejudices appropriate to an old stage of opinion into the new. They were attempting the impossible feat of retaining the superstructure, whilst entirely denying the foundation of their belief. Doctrines, accepted on the arbitrary authority of tradition, had to be represented as logical conclusions of the reasoning faculty. The change had taken place so gradually that the labourers in this singular piece of engineering were quite unaware of the true nature of the process.

4. The prestige had, therefore, long survived the vital force of the creeds. The admission in practical affairs of the fundamental doctrine of toleration preceded by a long period the concession of equal rights to all creeds ; and the Church retained privileges long after it had ceased to be supported by persecution. Similarly, the admission that intellectual errors were innocent, preceded by a great interval the practical acknowledgment that such errors were not proper objects of antipathy. A deist was hated when he could no longer be burnt ; and, on the same principle, whilst orthodox theology ostensibly based its pretensions on reason, the correlative duty of laying aside all prepossession, whilst examining them, was in practice denied. The old ideas were still surrounded

with a halo of sanctity. The burden of proof was supposed to rest on those who denied, not on those who asserted, that certain facts were of supernatural origin, and thus formed a complete exception to the general current of human history. The removal of a difficulty was, therefore, assumed to be equivalent to a convincing positive argument. If the most strained hypothesis would reconcile two apparently conflicting dogmas, the hypothesis was thought to be conclusively established. To prove that Christianity was not self-contradictory was thought to be the same thing as proving it to be true. A mode of enquiry which starts from the assumption that a certain conclusion is to be accepted if not demonstrably false, implies a mere dumbshow of agreement. The fundamental canon of criticism must be, that we should remain in doubt where the evidence is insufficient. The fundamental axiom of the apologists was to maintain dogmatic certainty until a negative was demonstrated. The orthodox reasoners transferred to an inappropriate sphere the presumption of the English law, that a man is innocent till his guilt is proved. They forgot that, in the court of criticism, we are bound to take the most probable opinion without regard to consequences. A judge may not imprison a man, though he thinks it probable that he is a forger; but a critic, with the same evidence before him, would reject the suspicious document.

5. When the infidel failed to convict the evangelists of lying or blundering, the apologists assumed that every word must needs be true. Their antagonists, meanwhile, tacitly admitted, or at any rate failed explicitly to deny, the justice of these assumptions. The prestige which still enveloped the old narrative awed even its impugners into mere desultory and unsystematic attacks. It followed that not only was there no accepted test for judging the accuracy of historical statements, but the very possibility of framing such a test was not distinctly contemplated. The contention being as to the reality of alleged supernatural manifestations, no attempt had been made to settle the canons by which the credibility of such narratives could be measured. The apologists held, and their opponents scarcely denied, that it was reasonable to believe statements, if made in the Bible, which would be at once rejected if they were found in Herodotus or Livy. The

deists cavilled at them in detail, without raising the general question. And yet it is plain that a settlement of the question is a necessary preliminary to any serious investigation. The credibility of alleged miracles affects not a statement here and there, but every step in the argument and the whole method of enquiry. The supernatural element cannot be cut out of the narrative without disintegrating the structure and reducing it from an infallible and flawless record, before which human reason can only bow with wonder, to a variety of more or less authentic documents full of error, from which the truth, so far as ascertainable, must be distilled in the critical laboratory. In the latter case, we must start with a complex apparatus, which, in the former, must be discarded from the beginning. Men were either raised from the dead 1,800 years ago or they were not. No middle term is possible, eagerly as commentators have tried to devise one or to evade the inevitable dilemma. Rational criticism is possible only on the constant assumption that the phenomena have always been governed by laws now in operation. Admit a systematic interference, or even an occasional interference, and we are at once hopelessly at sea without a compass. The first test of the credibility of an ancient document which, in the absence of collateral testimony, can be tried only by its inherent probability, vanishes, and we are left to prostrate ourselves in hopeless submission before an authority amenable to no human tribunal. Criticism, indeed, might be negatively confirmatory of the records, so far as it might be forced to admit its own incapacity for solving the problem and to recognise the presence of some element beyond its sphere of judgment. But it can find no mean between complete sovereignty and unequivocal abdication.

6. If, at the present day, a vacillation upon this point is frequently observable, the absence of even a dim perception of its necessity hopelessly vitiated the earlier school of criticism. The necessity of settling the primary axioms applicable to the problems in hand gradually emerged under the attempts at solution. For here, as elsewhere, the actual progress of enquiry reversed the logical order; and remote corollaries were discussed whilst axioms were still unsettled. The confusion thus produced was, however, only one result of

a still more deeply-seated error. Whilst belief in the miraculous nature of the Bible history still survived, belief in the continued agency of supernatural powers was daily growing fainter. There was nothing which shocked the imagination in the time-honoured legend of miraculous assistance vouchsafed to the Hebrew Joshua; but it was no more believed that the same power would help the strategy of Marlborough than it is now believed that it would help the strategy of Moltke.

7. History was thus broken into two parts, divided by an impassable gulf. Palestine had been the scene of the continuous action of supernatural forces, culminating in the stupendous miracle of the Incarnation. The first act of the world's drama was separated from the succeeding by the intervention of divine personages, whose influence was marked by catastrophes of corresponding magnitude. The modified rationalism of Protestantism had almost erected into a dogma the opinion of the cessation of miraculous powers in the Church. The period of the change was matter of controversy, but the miraculous was forced to recede into a dim vista of distant ages. Meanwhile, not only the orthodox, but the deists, retained the old conception of the world's history, whilst rejecting the ideas essentially bound up with it. Modern science everywhere banishes catastrophes both from the history of man and of his dwelling-place. But the doctrine of the continuity of history had then dawned upon none but the greatest minds. The deists, therefore, retained catastrophes, even whilst rejecting a belief in the only power that could produce them. They were, indeed, beginning to upset the preconceived notions of the exceptional character of the biblical history, by pointing out that the world included numerous races and religious sects besides the Jews and the Christians. The gradual realisation of this truth supplied here, as elsewhere, the most important leverage for breaking up the old opinions. It abolished the belief in an exceptional history as in an exclusive heaven for believers. But, as yet, though the prestige of the orthodox creed was assailed, and deists hinted that Moses was not much better than Mahomet, no rational theory was suggested to replace the old one. The deists, one might almost say, admitted the miracles, but

attributed them to men instead of God. They held that political constitutions had been invented at one bound by legislators, and religions by priests; whilst their opponents held that both had been dictated by the Almighty. Lycurgus had made the laws of Sparta, and Moses the laws of the Jews, though it was still disputable whether Moses was an impostor or an inspired prophet. In the same way, we find that it was assumed as a matter of course that language must either have been 'invented,' or given by direct interposition of Providence. The absence of any true historical sense involves two apparently contradictory assumptions; on the one hand, that primeval history recorded a series of events entirely different from any known to modern experience; on the other hand, that the early legislators were animated by views precisely like those of an eighteenth-century politician, and had deliberately contemplated all the results attributed to his action. Before the utter unreality of such views could be appreciated, the imagination required to be trained to a perception of the essential likenesses and contrasts of an earlier and later phase of society. The ancients were conceived as men of the modern type under the action of a totally different set of laws, instead of being regarded as men in a different mental stage under the action of precisely the same laws. The general assumption of divines was that the old order of society was exceptional; and if the deists disputed this doctrine when explicitly stated, the conception which they proposed to substitute was almost equally unnatural. The hypothesis which both sides overlooked was the only one now conceivable.

8. It is needless to touch at length on the want of scientific data. The perception of the comparative shortness of the historical period has been only less important than the perception of the smallness of the area of true believers in the world. To say that the world began 6,000 years ago is to make some spasmodic interference from without absolutely necessary. Time was required to give elbow-room for the development of modern society by natural causes; and, till a very late period, it was supposed that, even if the scriptural dates were erroneous, the attempt to maintain any other chronology was hopeless. The shortness of the time which

has elapsed since the Flood convinces Hartley that both language and writing must have been given by direct miraculous agency.[1] The Christian apologists ridiculed, with some reason, the attempts of the deists to rely upon the fabulous dates given in Egyptian or Chinese annals; and geology was, as yet, on the side of the orthodox. 'To anyone,' says Berkeley, 'who considers that, on digging into the earth, such quanties of shells, and, in some places, bones and horns of animals, are found sound and entire, after having lain there, in all probability, some thousands of years, it should seem probable that gems, medals, and implements in metal or stone might have lasted entire, buried under ground forty or fifty thousand years, if the world had been so old. How comes it. then,' he triumphantly asks, 'that no remains are found?'[2] The relics of primeval man had not yet revealed the Bronze and Stone ages, and till near the end of the century the same argument was used with equal confidence. The Deluge was a difficulty to Voltaire, instead of Voltaire's antagonists. It is little that the change of facts has forced theologians to abandon the historic accuracy of Jewish legends, but it was of vast importance that room should be made for the theory of evolution.

9. The result of all this is that, in witnessing the assault and the attack, we are beset by a strange sense of unreality. Theologians are striving to support the existence of a set of phantoms placed in an uncongenial atmosphere, where their ultimate doom is certain, and fancying that they have won a decisive victory, when they have shown that the fatal blow has not yet been struck. The deists, feeling vaguely the unreality of the dogmas opposed to them, are yet unable to discover the open secret. Admitting incautiously the accuracy of their opponents' assumptions, they aim their blows at trifling external weaknesses, and fail to strike at the heart. The development of this part of the deist controversy illustrates the mode by which the questions at issue gradually got themselves stated in terms less unworthy of a rational conception of the history of the human race.

[1] Hartley, prop. lxxxiii.

[2] Berkeley, 'Minute Philosopher,' dial. vi. § 23.

## II. LESLIE'S SHORT METHOD.

10. The first book of any importance, and one of the most characteristic of the whole controversy, was provoked by an early and crude manifestation of rationalism. Charles Blount, a man of some ability and a vigorous supporter of the revolution, was a disciple of Lord Herbert of Cherbury, who is regarded by Leland, with some plausibility, as the progenitor of the whole race of deists. Like Tindal, in the next century, Herbert and Blount had maintained the sufficiency of natural religion, though in their hands the doctrine had taken a somewhat different form. They accepted the challenge, so often put to Protestant writers, of giving a list of 'fundamentals,' and their lists did not include any of the specific doctrines of Christianity. Poor Blount sent a bullet through his brains in 1693, because the law would not permit him to marry his deceased wife's sister. In the year of his death appeared a book called the 'Oracles of Reason;' in 1695 it was republished by Charles Gildon—Pope's 'Gildon of the venal quill'—with some other tracts, and a silly preface in defence of suicide. The magniloquent title covers a meagre collection of tracts, stated to be written by Blount and his friends, which contain the germs of the ordinary deist argument. A kind of rudimentary scepticism is manifested in regard to some of the Old Testament miracles, and the story of the Fall is ridiculed under cover of the opinion recently advanced in Burnet's 'Archæologia Philosophica'—that it permitted or required an allegorical interpretation. A Life of Apollonius Tyanæus, previously published by Blount, had been supposed—and probably with reason—to indicate a disposition to set up a rival to the workers of Christian miracles, and perhaps to the Founder of the religion. Though the scepticism embodied in these writings is of the most veiled and modest character, it was enough to provoke the wrath of the robust theologians of those days. The monster who has since revealed all his terrors was not then permitted to show so much as the end of a claw without summary vengeance being inflicted upon him.

11. The supposed insult to Christianity brought Charles

Leslie into the field. Leslie was pronounced by Johnson to have been the only nonjuror who could reason. He was, in fact, no despicable master of the art of expressing pithy arguments in vigorous English. His honourable independence of character attached him to the fortunes of a small and declining party; whilst his pugnacity plunged him into controversies with almost every section of the majority. Besides numerous political skirmishes, he found time to carry on operations against Quakers, Deists, Socinians, Jews, and Papists. The far more surprising circumstance is stated, that he had the almost unique honour of converting several of his antagonists. Amongst those who surrendered to his prowess was Gildon, who put forth his recantation some years afterwards in a flabby repetition of the regular commonplaces, called the 'Deist's Manual.' The pleasure of dragging a captive infidel in triumph must have been diminished by the consciousness that he was so poor a creature; but we might turn over a long list of controversial writers without finding one who had even a Gildon to boast of.

12. The book which worked this conversion was intended by its author to extirpate the whole accursed generation at a blow, and was therefore honoured with the significant title, 'A Short and Easy Method with the Deists.' Leslie fancied that a single blast would be enough to disperse the little cloud no bigger than a man's hand. No faint suspicion had crossed his mind that it was destined to expand and darken with the coming years, till the light of the whole heaven should be intercepted. There is something pathetic about the fancy that, by arresting the little rivulet of unbelief, the whole mighty current of revolutionary thought could have been dried up. And yet Leslie, without knowing it, was making a vast concession. He was implicitly admitting the justice of the demand frequently put forward by the deists in one form or another, to the effect that a religion ought to be not merely demonstrable, but so plain that formal demonstration should be all but superfluous. If the belief in a certain set of dogmas was compulsory upon all men, the evidence of the dogmas should stare them in the face. The truth of Christianity should not require a long investigation, but be written in letters which he that ran might read.

When it was discovered that no such proof was producible, theologians were not slow to discover that the demand for it was unreasonable. At present it seemed that a plain and easy answer was at hand, and Leslie accepted the challenge in the spirit of an invincible champion. He proposed to lay down a test so simple, unequivocal, and easy of application, that doubt should be henceforth impossible to the candid enquirer. Every honest man should have in his hand an Ithuriel's spear, the mere touch of which should instantaneously detect imposture and reveal the truth.[1]

13. The test proposed by Leslie was expressed in four rules, destined to try the truth of alleged matters of fact. They are expressed as follows:—'First, That the matter of fact be such, as that men's outward senses, their eyes and ears, may be judges of it. Second, That it be done publicly, in face of the world. Third, That not only public monuments be kept up in honour of it, but some outward actions to be performed. Fourth, That such monuments and such actions or observances be instituted and do commence from the time the matter of fact was done.'[2] The first two rules, he says, make deception impossible at the time; the last two make it impossible at any subsequent period. The application of these tests establishes the truth of the Mosaic records and of the Gospels; and establishes equally the falsehood of the Mahommedan religion.

14. Leslie, it may be observed in passing, is a rationalist in principle. As a High Churchman he is able to discover his four marks in the institution of episcopacy, and has, indeed, arranged them in such a manner as to be specially suitable to sacramental and sacerdotal theories. He is, however, logical enough to find his ultimate ground of belief, not in authority, but in evidence. 'I receive the Scriptures,' he says, 'upon the testimony, not authority, of the Church; and I examine that testimony as I do other facts, till I have satisfied my private judgment there is no other way.'[3] Though he admits the Church to be in some sense the 'only and supreme judge of faith,'[4] he adds that there is an appeal to God from the Church, and the Church is bound to produce

[1] Leslie, 'Theol. Works,' vol. i. 12.
[2] Ib. i. 12.
[3] 'Tract on Private Authority and Judgment,' ib. i. 390.
[4] Ib. i. 404.

credentials satisfactory in the eye of reason. We believe the Scriptures, as he says elsewhere,[1] for the same reason that we believe that there is such a man as Alexander or Cæsar, or that there is such a town as Rome or Constantinople—namely, because there is overpowering evidence in their favour of the belief. The truth of Christianity, in short, is a clear demonstrable matter of fact, which we cannot doubt without falling into the 'incurable scepticism' which is really involved in the pretensions of the Church of Rome. He urges, moreover, with undeniable force, that the appeal to facts is the only one open to him in a controversy with the deists. In answer to certain dissenting ministers, who had urged the importance of dwelling more upon the internal evidence derivable from the beauty of the Scriptures, he explains that, though fully convinced of the truth of their opinions, he had to 'do with deists who were scoffers, and trampled these jewels under their feet; and therefore that some other topic must be found out for them to persuade them by the plain principles of reason, to which only they appealed, and of which indeed only they were capable.'[2]

15. How, then, did Leslie come to believe that the test provided was so simple and so effective? The fact to be proved, he says, must have been done publicly, and a commemorative ceremony must have been instituted at the time. The deists, he argues, could produce no instance of a falsehood supported by such evidence.[3] And, indeed, when we find that one of his antagonists quoted the 'pied piper of Hamel,'[4] as a case in point, we see that the *argumentum ad hominem* was so far tolerably effective. Credulity was not confined to the Jewish records, and William Tell's chapel would then have been regarded as supporting an historical truth, instead of a groundless myth. The deists could not produce fictions, because they had not yet detected them. Still, it might be asked whether Leslie's proofs were applicable to the case of Christianity. How could we know that the Passover was instituted at the time of the events disputed; or what evidence is there for the date of the first celebration of the

[1] 'Case stated between Churches of Rome and England,' Leslie, iii. 45.
[2] 'Vindication of the Short Method,' ib. i. 277.
[3] Ib. i. 259.
[4] Ib. i. 265.

Lord's Supper, except that which may be alleged to prove Christ's death? Le Clerc suggested this difficulty in the 'Bibliothèque Choisie' in 1706. Festivals, he said, were often instituted by the heathen in memory of events which had never happened, and referred by subsequent generations to the period assigned for the event. Leslie's reply curiously shows his utter unconsciousness that he was begging the question. You wholly give up the cause, he says, when you admit that the beginnings of these institutions were not committed to history. 'For then there is no book to be confronted with our holy Bible, which was wrote at the time when the facts therein related were done, and the institutions in memory of them were then made by the very actors in the facts—that is, by Moses and Christ.'[1] He assumes, that is, as an ultimate fact, the authenticity and contemporaneity of the records; and his reply to the critic really comes to this: the difference between me and other people is that my records are true and theirs are not. The odd grammar of his four marks is characteristic of this. The second, for example, ought to be 'That it be alleged to have been done,' &c. Leslie did not clearly see that he was distinctly making allegation the same thing as proof. The assumption runs through his whole argument, and is the foundation for a further dilemma. If contemporaneous accounts of miraculous events were published, the accounts must either have been true or forged, for there is no room for the gradual development of intellectual error. 'Could Moses,' he asks, have persuaded 600,000 men that he had been through the sea in the manner related in Exodus if it had not been true? If he could, it would have been a greater miracle than the other.'[2] In which, indeed, there is much force, though it never occurs to Leslie that, on this theory, to prove a miracle you have only to invent witnesses. He dwells, indeed, on the difficulty of subsequently producing forged records. The book which contains the story is the statute-book of the people, and therefore not liable to forgery. 'If I should forge such a statute-book for England, and publish it next term, could I make all the judges, lawyers, and people believe that this was their true and only statute-book, by which their causes had been determined these many hundred years

[1] Leslie, i. 272. [2] 'Truth of Christianity Demonstrated,' ib. i. 295.

past?'[1] The deists were inclined to accept this awkward alternative, and set down everything to the power of the priests. Leslie replies that, if the priests were indeed capable of passing off such cheats upon the laity, and of making them believe that they had always been in the habit of doing what they had never done, the priests must be the 'cunningest and wisest of mankind.'[2] Nay, they would be outdoing 'all that has ever been related of the infernal powers,' and, indeed, as he warms to the argument, he declares that, 'as that exceeds all the power of hell and devils, so it is more than ever God Almighty has done since the foundation of the world,' for God has never contradicted the evidence of our senses. This rhetorical flourish illustrates the absurdity of the hypothesis with which he sought to saddle the deists, and it must be admitted that, till a more rational alternative was suggested, they were in an awkward dilemma. Sometimes, indeed, unbelievers reared up a kind of precarious refuge by suggesting the possibility of a pious fraud. Leslie roundly replies that this theory, which is intended to preserve some respect for the good designs of the original authors, would prove them to be 'not only cheats and impostors, but blasphemers and an abomination before God,'[3] and adds that, according to 'the law in the Scriptures,' they would be condemned to be stoned to death.

16. The argument is rounded off by a comparison of the claims of Christianity and other religions; and his theory upon this subject completes the picture of his historical conception. There are, he says, only four religions in the world: 'Christianity, Judaism, Heathenism, and Mahommedanism.'[4] Judaism is confuted by its own evidences. Heathenism, which means apparently Paganism, is a mass of silly fables, from which the four marks are palpably absent. The same remark applies equally to Mahommedanism. The bare religion of

[1] Leslie, i. 296. 'That an English writer of the time of Henry III. should have been able to put off on his countrymen as a compendium of English law a treatise of which the entire form and a third of the contents were directly borrowed from the Corpus Juris, and that he should have ventured on this experiment in a country where the systematic study of the Roman law was formally proscribed, will always be among the most hopeless enigmas in the history of jurisprudence.'—Maine's 'Ancient Law,' p. 82.

[2] Ib. i. 44. [3] Ib. i. 291. [4] Ib. i. 354.

nature, to which the deist appeals in despair, is demonstrated to be practically useless, by the case of the 'Hottentots at the Cape of Good Hope, hardly distinguishable from beasts.'[1] And thus we are finally brought to the conclusion that 'there is but one religion in the world nor ever was;' Judaism being Christianity in type, Heathenism a corruption, and Mahommedanism a heresy of Christianity; so that all is Christianity still. And thus we are driven to choose between the alternatives that Christianity is true, or that the only religion in the world is founded on a mass of utterly incredible imposture. The argument might be combined with that of Prideaux's 'Letter to the Deists,' appended to a Life of Mahomet. The question, as Prideaux conceives it, is 'whether the Christian religion be a truth really given us by divine revelation from God our Creator; or else a mere human invention, contrived by the first propagators of it to impose a cheat upon mankind.'[2] The decision is made by discovering seven marks of imposture in Mahommedanism, and arguing that they cannot be found in Christianity. Mahomet was of course regarded as a vulgar cheat, moved solely by lust and ambition, so long as Christian theology was strong enough to condemn all other forms of thought religious and philosophical.

17. Leslie gives in its early form the argument which was to serve Christian apologists for the next generations. The assumptions which they generally covered with greater dexterity are stated by him with the most explicit frankness. People knew and could have proved that there were other religions in the world besides the Christian; they knew that there was no conclusive evidence to show the contemporaneity and authenticity of the records; but they tacitly accepted the bold assertions of Leslie with little difficulty, because formal logic is useless till the terms employed have really impressed the imagination. Long after the days of Newton, the stars have often in practice been regarded as mere lights for our paltry planet; and the millions of the East, long after China had been visited, were considered as a mere appendage to the inhabitants of Palestine. The Christian records were valued at the orthodox rate when the necessity of some preliminary examination was admitted in theory; and

[1] Leslie, i. 365.

[2] 'Letter to the Deists,' ib. p. 5.

it was with extreme slowness that any conception of a systematic investigation of the nature of the documents whose truth was at issue dawned upon the minds of the disputants.

18. The question indeed was first raised in a controversy which sprang up from an incidental remark of Toland's, in his 'Life of Milton,' 1698. In speaking of the *Eikon Basilike*, he observed that the success of that forgery illustrated the success of pieces published in primitive and uncritical times 'under the name of Christ, his Apostles, and other great persons;' and adds a hint that 'the spuriousness of several more such books was yet undiscovered.'[1] His enemies were already convinced that his words deserved the worst interpretation in all cases; in this, they not unnaturally assumed that he was referring to the books of the sacred canon; and a controversial pamphlet or two was aimed at him. Toland, in a pamphlet entitled 'Amyntor,' disavowed the imputed meaning, and declared that he had in his mind only some such books as the Epistle of Barnabas and the Pastor of Hermas.[2] The most remarkable result of the controversy was its share in suggesting Lardner's elaborate work upon the 'Credibility of the Gospel History,' which, in its turn, supplied Paley with his best materials for the 'Evidences of Christianity.'

## *III. COLLINS ON FREETHINKING.*

19. The adoption of this mode of attack would probably have required more boldness than the deists were as yet prepared to show. The writings of Collins, who succeeded Toland as the most prominent representative of Deism, curiously illustrate the timidity of the assault. The infidelity, indeed, though covert, was sufficiently unmistakable to explain the storm of indignation aroused; but the method adopted was calculated to provide at least an ostensible retreat from imputations of direct hostility to Christianity. Commentators had unconsciously provided an ambush, from which deists could aim their weapons in comparative security. The critical study of the Scriptures had made progress, though with a

[1] 'Life of Milton,' pp. 91, 92.

[2] 'Amyntor,' p. 44.

narrow limitation of its sphere ; and reason had been called in as an auxiliary before it was allowed to assert its independence. The office assigned to it was to restore the fair proportions of the sacred edifice, to remove superficial blemishes and the accretions of darker ages, and so reveal the perfect symmetry and mutual interdependence of the whole. Restoration, as in another kind of architecture, was perilously near to destruction ; and these industrious and pious labourers, using an instrument whose powers they little understood, were really sapping the foundations of their faith, or at least laying bare to profane inspection the weak places by which an entrance might be forced. To explain a difficulty is to signalise its existence ; and even the bare fact that criticism was regarded as applicable to the Bible was at once fatal to the popular conception of its absolute, flawless, and supernatural perfection. To explain that you are only removing the external rust is vain ; for who shall say where the rust ends and the true substance begins ? The popular instinct is nearer the truth than the fluent explanations of plausible critics. Give up the puritancial reverence for the letter, and everything else is a question of time. The admixture of a human element once granted, it becomes practically impossible to assign bounds to critical enquiry.

20. Amongst other methods by which it was attempted to evade difficulties, with the single result of making them more conspicuous, one ingenious device, sanctioned not only by recent commentators, but by the practice of reverend antiquity, was specially convenient for the purposes of the deists. The spiritual insight of reverent minds, when shocked by certain passages in the Bible, had taken refuge in the naïve device of allegorical interpretation. Indeed, in those early days when criticism was as yet inconceivable, the fathers had often spoken of the literal meaning of the Scriptures with a contempt which would have shocked the less robust faith of their successors. A believer writing to believers could take liberties with the text in unsuspicious innocence, from which rationalising divines shrank in the presence of Bayle and Le Clerc. The border-line between the domains of reason and fancy was so ill-defined, that it is difficult to understand how much weight the writers themselves attached to what frequently

appears to us to be a childish display of such ingenuity as is more fitly applied to the manufacture of conundrums. Their fancy had run riot in obedience to mere caprice or a serious wish to spiritualise the narrative by however crude a device. Quaint analogies were detected between the Old and New Testament, which served as flying buttresses to support the temple, whilst bolder adventurers had gone still deeper, and tried to improve the solid foundation of facts by an admixture of the most arbitrary fancies. Nothing could better suit the purpose of the deists. A denial of the literal truth of the Scriptures might be covered by an ostensible substitution of the fanciful interpretation. The allegory served the purpose of the props by which a mine is supported beneath a fortress. When the excavation was properly made, and the assailants had withdrawn, they would collapse and bring down the whole in ruin. The device had already been illustrated in the discussion about the Garden of Eden. Burnet had used allegory, as it would seem in perfectly good faith, to get rid of difficulties; and Blount had quoted him, in the hope of showing them to be insoluble.

21. The advance of the controversy during its earlier stages was determined by these considerations. The first attack made by Collins turned simply upon the general doubts raised by the progress of criticism. In the next attack he took advantage of the flimsiness of the external supports of prophetic interpretation. And afterwards the same line of assault was pushed further by Woolston, who attempted to convert into allegory the most essential facts of historical Christianity. The deists, as will presently appear, had in many ways the worst of the argument; but the spirit of doubt, once evoked, spread by a kind of spontaneous process, and gradually bit more deeply into the substance of the old system. The first vague whisperings of suspicion that criticism might prove fatal to the theory of flawless accuracy which had passed current in the days of unquestioning faith, became gradually articulated into definite assertions that this or that part of the history was actually erroneous. At each step in their progress, the deists received a reply which, in the then state of critical enquiry, was formally sufficient. And yet each step provoked a further enquiry,

until the sceptical spirit culminated in Hume's systematic denial of the truth of all miraculous narratives. The reason was, doubtless, that the orthodox arguments, though they satisfied all the requirements of syllogisms, involved assumptions which were weakened by the mere fact that they were questioned. Though the deists could not establish actual contradictions in the books of Scripture, the mere habit of applying to the Scriptures the ordinary tests of critical enquiry, tended to destroy the sacred awe by which they had been guarded. The defence, too, was as damaging as the assault ; for though every breach was repaired, the singular straits to which the defenders were driven raised a strong presumption that the position was not impregnable. Though each attack might hitherto have failed, success in any one attack would be fatal.

22. The champions who fought out the first battle on this ground were most unequally matched. Anthony Collins, a country gentleman, of much more than average reading and ability, a favoured disciple of Locke,[1] and, by the confession of hostile writers, a man of amiable character and high integrity in private life, had already directed some pamphlets against the orthodox views. The most remarkable are attempts to develop the arguments already suggested by Toland. In one (1710) he criticises King's sermon upon Predestination ; and argues, by help of principles adopted from Bayle, that the legitimate tendency of King's theory of 'analogical' or 'metaphorical' knowledge was in favour of scepticism. In another ('An Essay concerning the Use of Reason,' &c. (second edition, 1709), he attacks the distinction between things contrary to, and above, reason, by Toland's line of argument. His controversy with Clarke as to the nature of the soul seems to have excited more attention. At length his 'Discourse of Freethinking,' published in 1713, brought down upon him the sledge-hammer of Bentley's criticism. The energy of the blow was worthy of that sinewy blacksmith of literature. Collins was considered to have been pulverised by the shock. Dr. Hare greeted Bentley's labours with an 'extravagantly laudatory pamphlet;'[2] and the Cambridge Senate

[1] See the affectionate letters written to Collins by Locke. Locke's Works, vol. ix. See, too, Mr. Fox Bourne's 'Life of Locke.'

[2] See Monk's 'Bentley,' i. 348; ii. 43 and 232.

passed a unanimous vote of thanks. Hare, at a later period, found out that Bentley's merits were alloyed with serious defects; but they had then quarrelled over their rival editions of Terence, or, as Newton put it, the two divines were fighting over a play-book. Bentley left his work unfinished because the court refused to back him in the demand for certain academical fees, and consequently discovered that 'those whom he wrote for were as bad as those he wrote against.' The phrase implies a queer confusion between the interests of the Church of Christ and those of the Court of George I. The zeal for true religion did not in those days burn with the purest of flames.

23. Meanwhile, however, Bentley's book had, undoubtedly, all the outward appearance and some of the reality of a conclusive refutation of his antagonist. It breathes that uncompromising spirit of hostility which rather shocks our milder generation, but which, to do him justice, implies a genuine conviction of the goodness of his cause. Bentley not only treats Collins as a fool and a knave, but obviously believes him to be both. The contempt of a powerful reasoner for a shuffling caviller, of a thoroughly trained and deeply learned critic for a mere dabbler in literature, and the hatred of a theologian for a man who holds a different opinion, are blended in every paragraph, and animate the terse manly Bentleian style. That masculine sense which has been manifested in many different forms of English writing by Chillingworth, Swift, Cobbett, and other sturdy gladiators of the breed, informs the letters of 'Phileleutherus Lipsiensis'—Bentley's pseudonym. He, of course, holds that his antagonist objects to religion because he has a personal interest in denying the existence of hell;[1] and he gives a broad hint that the government might be forced to suppress the liberty which had been abused for such wicked purposes.[2] But the arguments arise from no suspicion that any logical gaps in them require supplementary aid.

24. Collins's discourse was directed to establish two propositions; one which it was possible openly to avow, the other needing a certain veil of decent evasion. He argued in defence of the fundamental tenet of rationalism, namely—that all sound

[1] Bentley, 'Phileleutherus Lipsiensis,' sec. 13. [2] Ib. sec. 14.

belief must be based on free enquiry. Bentley naturally replies by claiming this as his own, and, indeed, goes rather beyond fair limits, by asserting further that no one, not even the Roman Catholics, denied it.[1] But, in addition to this, Collins was evidently anxious to prove that the adoption of rationalist principles would involve the abandonment of a belief in supernaturalism. This opinion, however, is not distinctly enunciated nor clearly separated from that upon which it is based. It may be doubted how far Collins had pushed his own logic, and the result is to impress upon his book a character of shuffling and subterfuge. He thus gives many advantages to the vigorous reasoner who opposed him. When, for example, he gives instances of the power of freethought to disperse superstition, and claims various great men as freethinkers, Bentley convicts him of unworthy shuffling. The freethinking and the freethinkers, he says in effect, are on my side, and not on yours; and undoubtedly there was much plausibility in the claim. 'The devil,' says Collins truly, 'is entirely banished the United Provinces, where freethinking is in the greatest perfection; whereas all round about that commonwealth, he appears in various shapes, sometimes in his own, and sometimes in the shape of an old black gentleman, sometimes in that of a dead man, sometimes in that of a cat.'[2] To this Bentley replies, with infinite scorn, that the honour of routing the devil belonged, not to the sect of freethinkers, but to the Royal Society, the Boyles and the Newtons. Nothing could be more true and more apparently conclusive. Bentley did not admit, nor did Collins explicitly maintain, that, though Newton was even slavish in his adherence to the letter, Newton might be, in reality, an unconscious ally of the despised freethinkers. A similar perplexity runs through Collins's attempts to quote the authority of various ancient and modern celebrities. His book is concluded by a singular list, stretching from Socrates to the Archbishop (Tillotson), 'whom all English freethinkers own as their head.'[3] He quotes various passages in order to show the bias of these leaders of thought; and it was here that his luckless translations exposed him to Bentley's most cutting taunts. Poor Collins's scholarship is slashed and torn till pity, if pity were

[1] Bentley, sec. 5. [2] Collins, p. 28. [3] Ib. p. 171.

a possible emotion towards a deist, might have touched some of his opponents. It is a case in which it is impossible to avoid the hackneyed allusion to the fourth-form schoolboy. The only excuse, indeed, for some of Collins's blunders is that he is not so much quoting Cicero as an authority for his opinions, as using Cicero's language to provide a convenient mask for his thoughts. This is only disingenuous so far as all irony may be regarded as disingenuous. The argument itself suffers from the old ambiguity. If Collins included as freethinkers all who differed from the prevalent creed of the time, Bentley would not deny that freethinkers had done good service. He would admit the claim, and add that Christianity could produce its millions of martyrs to a single Socrates. If, on the other hand, Collins meant, as Bentley assumed him to insinuate, that all these freethinkers were atheists, then he was palpably wrong. It does not seem to occur to either disputant to allege or deny with sufficient clearness that modern freethinkers could claim to be acting on the same methods as ancient Christians and philosophers, although with different results. And thus Collins lays himself fairly open by attempting not only to vindicate the right of freethought, but to insinuate that it must uniformly tend towards Deism, or, as Bentley would have said, Atheism. Freethinking, like Rationalism, had indeed acquired a special connotation by a very natural process ; and the ambiguity of Collins's language enabled Bentley to win a decided victory. That freethought in its strictest sense would, in fact, lead away from orthodoxy, yet remained to be proved, and till the problem was solved by experiment, Bentley was unassailable.

25. The chief weight of the controversy really rested upon one point. Collins, as Shaftesbury had recently done, quoted the remarkable passage from Jeremy Taylor's 'Liberty of Prophesying,' in which the great divine, abandoning himself, as he so often does, to his marvellous flow of rhetoric, sums up all the difficulties which attend the interpretation of the Scriptures. Taylor's argument was indeed identical with that of the deists. He says, in most forcible words, that the interpretation of Scripture is attended with so many difficulties that we should not punish anyone for arriving at a wrong

conclusion. Collins proceeds to give instances of the widely different opinions which have been in fact reached by divines; and Bentley's summary dismissal of the argument as 'threadbare obsolete stuff'[1] was more daring than satisfactory. Bossuet could have helped Collins to a few more illustrations of his doctrine. The most impressive statement, however, was to the effect that Dr. Mills, Bentley's early friend and patron, had discovered 30,000 new readings in the New Testament. Dr. Mills' announcement had already scandalised the versatile divine, Dr. Whitby, and was frequently turned to account by the deists. Bentley's reply was, within certain limits, complete and crushing. He proves, that is, beyond all cavil, that the existence of that or a greater number of readings need not render the text doubtful. So far as Collins meant to assert that the text was entirely uncertain in consequence of these variations, he was convicted of utter critical incompetence. Yet Bentley's argument, it must be added, implies the abandonment of the old Protestant theory. The Bible is so far from being an absolutely flawless document, that the determination of the text involves the use of a complete critical apparatus altogether beyond ordinary expositors. Collins had said that very extensive knowledge was required in order to understand the Bible satisfactorily. Bentley snatches at the statement in order to taunt Collins as disqualified by his own admission from biblical criticism.[2] The triumph of Bentley's logic is complete; but it leads directly to the admissions that the dogma of verbal inspiration is untenable, and that the common theory, put forward by many Christian advocates, of the fitness of every common artisan to be a judge of the evidences of religion, is absurd, and Bentley admits the competence of that court of historical criticism, before which his dogmas were sure to receive a serious trial. Collins's crude notions of the functions of criticism were easily exposed, yet he indeed sees the point pretty clearly, as appears from a note in a subsequent edition. He shows that the Bible is so far reduced to the level of other books, if not, as he adds, below that level, from the fact that sects had an interest in the introduction of spurious readings.[3] Collins, however, is clearly wrong on the immediate issue, though at

[1] Bentley, sec. 26. [2] Ib. sec. 8. [3] See Dutch edition, pp. 72, 73.

bottom Bentley was equally unconscious of the true nature of that tremendous power which he was setting to work. Bentley's triumph, so far as it is genuine, is thus significant of the same fact. Theologians could still honestly claim to be the truest rationalists and the most legitimate freethinkers, because the destructive agency of science and criticism could be as yet but dimly suspected. Those who ventured, like Collins, to foretell the coming deluge could be safely ridiculed, when as yet there was but a cloud as big as a man's hand. And, for the time, their defeat was crushing. It is only right to add that, in some cases, Bentley is content with triumphing over his opponent's blunders in scholarship, and leaves the argument substantially untouched.[1]

26. By a curious infelicity, poor Collins exposed himself to the attack of the keenest satirist, as well as the acutest critic, in the English language.[2] Swift attacked him with that strangely ingenious irony of which he possessed the secret; for to Swift, who was then at the height of his intimacy with Bolingbroke, an infidel who expressed his infidelity was hateful, and specially hateful if, like Collins, he was a Whig and a professed hater of priests from Sacheverel upwards. Collins, moreover, had given provocation by jestingly proposing in the Discourse to draft off such 'zealous divines'[3] as Atterbury, Swift, and others, to propagate the gospel in foreign parts; the Church of England would then, he suggested, triumph through the world and faction cease at home. The retaliation came in the shape of a tract called 'Mr. Collins' Discourse of Freethinking, put into plain English, by way of abstract for the use of the Poor.' It may be read as a convenient substitute for Collins's tract, which was always slipshod in style and argument, and is now tedious, in spite of its shortness. Swift's abstract is, of course, caricatured; but his arguments only require toning down to make them an accurate copy of the original; whilst the irony of facts, more powerful even than Swift's, has converted not a few of the arguments which

[1] For some imputations on Collins's behaviour in regard to this controversy, see note at end of this chapter.

[2] Collins's book must have been published in 1712, though dated 1713. Swift mentions his answer in the Journal to Stella, in Jan. 16th, $171\frac{2}{3}$.

[3] Collins, p. 43.

to him appeared as burlesque absurdities into sober truisms. A short specimen reveals the nature of the device. 'The priests tell me,' says Swift, in his character of abstract maker, 'I am to believe in the Bible, but freethinking tells me otherwise in many particulars. The Bible says the Jews were a nation favoured by God; but I who am a freethinker say that cannot be, because the Jews lived in a corner of the earth, and freethinking makes it plain that those who live in corners cannot be favourites of God. The New Testament all along asserts the truth of Christianity, but freethinking denies it, because Christianity was communicated but to few, and whatever is communicated but to a few cannot be true; for that is like whispering, and the proverb says, that there is no whispering without lying.'[1] This and much more is admirable fooling, and Collins must have been annoyed at seeing his excellent arguments thus endowed with a cap and bells, and yet having a provoking appearance of preserving their identity. The attack was specially unkind from the author of the 'Tale of a Tub.' Collins in his Discourse had indulged in some rather feeble satire about a certain imaginary standard of 'eyesight faith.' A juggler might order his followers to believe that a ball could go through a table, that a thread could be burnt and made whole again, and so forth.[2] Such fun reminds us of Swift's tremendous buffoonery as to the dogmas enforced by Lord Peter, but is poor and colourless in comparison. The real difference is, that Swift's contempt for the follies of mankind at large is incomparably more thoroughgoing and effective than Collins's contempt for the vagaries of priests.

27. The main argument which Swift interweaves in his sarcasms is, in fact, the argument from misanthropy. All men are fools; therefore freethinking is an absurdity. Freethinkers are knaves as well as fools, and therefore their conclusions are contemptible. 'The bulk of mankind,' to use his own language, 'is as well qualified for flying as for thinking.'[3] If they persist in trying to perform the operation which they mistake for thinking, we shall degenerate into a wretched rabble of Quakers, Anabaptists, Papists, and Muggletonians.

[1] Swift's Works (edition 1859), vol. ii. 195. [2] 'Discourse,' &c., p. 17.
[3] Swift, ii. 197.

In all which, indeed, there is no small substratum of very sound sense, which might be worth pondering by those who held that liberty of thought implied the capacity of every ignorant and stupid man to solve the great problem without assistance. If anarchy were the only alternative to arbitrary authority, the choice might be difficult. Reason still appeared in its purely destructive aspect; and the prospect of developing a rational authority from the free play of argument was not very brilliant to those who shared Swift's opinion of the deists. 'It is objected,' he says,[1] speaking as the expounder of Collins, 'that freethinkers themselves are the most infamous, wicked, and senseless of all mankind. I answer, first, we say the same of priests and other believers. But the truth is, men of all sects are equally good and bad; for no religion whatsoever contributes in the least to mend men's lives. I answer, secondly, that freethinkers use their understanding; but those who have religion do not; therefore the first have more understanding than the others; witness Toland, Tindal, Gildon, Glendon, Coward, and myself. For, use legs and have legs. I answer, thirdly, that freethinkers are the most virtuous persons in the world, for all freethinkers most certainly differ from the priests and from 999 of 1000 of those among whom they live, and are therefore virtuous, of course, because everybody hates them.' What, in short, was to be expected from these wretched scribblers, these denizens of Grub Street and revilers of dignitaries, making feeble attacks in slipshod English, with half-understood scraps of learning, upon men like Bentley and Swift, in the attempt to persuade a rabble as ignorant as themselves? Let them be hooted down as enemies of Church and State, and rejoice if they escaped flogging.

Poor Collins, frightened by the storm he had raised, retired for a time to Holland, and was ridiculed for his cowardice by the men who had been crying out for persecution.[2] He was not however crushed, though for a time his defeat seemed to be conclusive.

[1] Swift, p. 198.

[2] 'If ever man deserved to be denied the common benefits of air and water, it is the author of a discourse of freethinking.'—'Guardian,' No. 3 (a paper attributed either to the admirable Berkeley or the good-natured Steele.)

### *IV. THE ARGUMENT FROM PROPHECY.*

28. In 1724 he returned to the attack in a book declared by Warburton to be one of the most plausible ever written against Christianity. The hostile intention is covered by a transparent disguise. The mask of which he availed himself was provided by one of the most eccentric writers of the period. William Whiston was a man of real learning, and sufficiently distinguished as a mathematician to be the successor of Newton in the Lucasian professorship. Unluckily, he was destined, like his great predecessor, to illustrate the truth that a man may be an eminent mathematician and a childish theologian. The utmost ingenuity in tracing out remote and complex consequences of established truths may be consistent with a singular incapacity for dealing with evidence. Our national reverence for Newton's scientific achievements has deterred us from laughing at his dabblings in the interpretation of prophecy; and, indeed, sighs rather than smiles should greet the melancholy spectacle of a noble intellect running to waste in puzzling over meaningless riddles. Poor Whiston has not the same claim upon our tenderness. And yet we feel for him something of the pitying kindness which he generally excited in his contemporaries. With a childlike simplicity worthy of the Vicar of Wakefield, he was ready to sacrifice all his prospects rather than disavow or disguise a tittle of his creed. Had that creed been one of greater significance, disciples would have revered him as a worthy martyr, and adversaries regarded him as dangerous in proportion to his virtue. Unluckily it was a creed untenable by any man of sound intellect. It was filled with queer crotchets picked up in various byways of learning, and valued by the collector in proportion to their oddity. Friends and opponents—for he had no enemies—regarded his absurdities with a pitying smile, and were glad to see him pick up a harmless living by giving astronomical lectures and publishing pamphlets on a vast variety of subjects. He was a friend of Clarke, who sympathised with some of his sentiments, though not equally candid in avowing them; and the chief sup-

porter of a certain society for restoring primitive Christianity, which, in his lips, meant a form of Arianism, to which several of the deists of the time belonged. All innovators were naturally well disposed to this dealer in theological curiosities, and he unintentionally rendered them some service in spreading their opinions.

29. In the present case, he had published an 'Essay towards restoring the true Text of the Old Testament, and for vindicating the Citations made thence in the New Testament.' He had observed that the prophecies ordinarily introduced by such formulas as 'that it might be fulfilled,' did not bear the sense placed upon them by the Evangelists and the writers of the Epistles. He was too honest to take refuge in the ordinary device about a supposed double sense; and he therefore struck out a theory—not more utterly without foundation than most of those in which he habitually indulged—to the effect that the Jews had at an early period corrupted the text of the Old Testament in order to evade the inferences drawn from the plain words of the original. In order to restore the text, Whiston proposed to rely upon various old authorities, such as the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Chaldee Paraphrases, and his favourite work the Apostolic Constitutions, upon such quotations by the old fathers as he supposes, for various reasons, to refer to the uncorrupted text, and finally, to no small degree, upon his own unassisted penetration. A single specimen of his method will be sufficient.[1] The words quoted by Matthew from Isaiah as to a virgin conceiving and bearing a son, and by him applied to Christ, have obviously a different application in the original. In particular, the time within which the prophecy is to be fulfilled is restricted by the words: 'Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil and choose the good; for before the child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings.' Whiston, therefore, rearranges the chapters in which the words occur, so as to apply these words to the prophet's son, and the words immediately preceding to the Messiah. Collins argues that, even with these alterations, the prophecy cannot be made to fit the facts; but

[1] See Whiston, p. 229, &c.

Whiston is evidently prepared to shrink from no conjecture, however fanciful, which will meet the case.

30. This argument, put forward in all simplicity by Whiston, was turned to account by Collins. His book, called 'A Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion' (1724), takes the form of an attack upon Whiston, and his reasoning is obviously serious so long as it is superfluous. He shows, that is, what was abundantly plain to every human creature, except Whiston, that Whiston's mode of clipping and docking the prophecies to fit them to the events was altogether preposterous. But he fully agrees with Whiston that, without such clipping and docking, the events cannot be made to tally with the prophecies taken in their literal sense. The natural inference, however, is evaded—with what degree of seriousness is tolerably plain—by the device perfected by the allegorists.

31. The book is divided into two parts. The first opens with an elaborate piece of reasoning, intended to prove that the argument from the fulfilment of prophecy is not merely an argument, but the one critical and essential argument for the truth of Christianity. The claim put forward by the Apostles and by Christ himself was simply and solely the claim to the Jewish Messiahship. The acceptance of that claim constituted,[1] as Locke had maintained in the 'Reasonableness of Christianity,' the fundamental article of the true faith. Even the miracles, ordinarily adduced as the proof of the divine authority of the Gospel, could by themselves prove nothing. We are ordered to disregard them by our Lord himself, unless they fall in with the teaching of the earlier revelation; and they are significant only in so far as the power of working miracles was one of the marks assigned by the prophets to the character of Messiah. Thus it is in the Old Testament alone that we are to look for the credentials of Christianity; and indeed, 'to speak properly, the Old Testament is yet the sole true canon of Scripture,'[2] as it alone contains a systematic claim to inspiration. If the proofs from prophecy be valid, Christianity is 'invincibly established on its true foundation.'[3] If they are invalid, 'then has Christianity no just foundation.'[4]

[1] See the 'Literal Scheme,' p. 323.
[2] 'Grounds and Reasons,' p. 13.
[3] Ib. p. 26.
[4] Ib. p. 31.

32. Having thus urged, with what degree of plausibility matters little, that to sever the connection between Christianity and the prophecies is to sever the artery from which our faith is supplied, he proceeds to ask how far the connection can be made out. Collins begins by showing that, whatever else may be made of them, the fulfilment of the prophecies cannot be literal. The prophecies most commonly alleged—such as the prophecy of the Virgin bearing a child—are, as he argues, easily shown to refer, 'in their obvious and primary sense, to other matters than those which they are produced to prove.'[1] It remains, then, that the proof must be 'typical or allegorical.' To explain the nature of this proof, Collins refers to the learned Surenhusius, a Dutch writer of the period, who had spent much pains in the investigation of the Talmud. Surenhusius states that the Jewish doctors 'used ten ways of citing and explaining the Old Testament,'[2] and Collins gravely sets down these methods, with some references to the instances in which they had been used by the New Testament writers. The first is reading the words with other points substituted for those generally used. The second is 'changing the letters, whether those letters be of the same organ (as the Jewish grammarians speak) or no.' The third is changing both letters and points. The fourth is adding some letters and taking away others. The fifth is transposing words and letters. The sixth is dividing one word into two. The seventh is adding other words to those that are there, 'as is manifestly done by the apostles throughout the New Testament.'[3] The eighth is changing the order of words. The ninth is changing the order of words and adding other words. The tenth is 'changing the order of words, adding words, and retrenching words, which is a method often used by Paul.' Collins adds an account of certain particular applications of these methods by which the learned Surenhusius succeeds in transforming the prophecies into statements by which the prophets themselves might have been startled. A familiar difficulty turns upon the words 'he shall be called a Nazarene,' which, though quoted by St. Matthew, occur nowhere in the Old Testament. Still Isaiah's prediction that the Messiah

[1] 'Grounds and Reasons,' p. 48. [2] Ib. p. 59. [3] Ib. p. 60.

should dwell in Galilee was much the same as if he had said that he should dwell at Nazareth, which was a city of Galilee; and though he never was called a Nazarene, he might have been called one, in virtue of his dwelling at Nazareth. Moreover, Isaiah says that 'there shall come forth a rod out of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.' Now a branch is in Hebrew, Netsar, which may carry an enigmatical allusion to Nazareth. And, finally, in another place, the Messiah is called Tsemah, which means a branch, and is therefore equivalent to Netsar or a Nazarene.[1] Collins concludes by maintaining that such appeals to the fulfilment of prophecy were not in the nature of a mere *argumentum ad hominem*, but must have been regarded as valid by all the Christians to whom they were addressed.

33. Collins's general drift is obvious. The only mode, he argues, of rendering the prophecies applicable is to adopt laws of interpretation which would make any set of words compatible with any meaning. Putting his statements together, Collins has asserted, first, that Christianity is false if the prophecies have not been fulfilled; secondly, that they have not been fulfilled literally; and, thirdly, that to show them to have been fulfilled typically—the only possible alternative—we have to fall into the absurdities of the learned Surenhusius. In fact, his meaning may be brought out by everywhere substituting 'nonsense' for 'allegory.'

34. A long and tiresome argument follows, directed against Whiston, and plunges into a variety of remarks about the Samaritan Pentateuch and the meaning of various prophecies. Collins endeavours to show, what indeed is sufficiently plain, that poor Whiston's mode of arbitrarily modifying the old text is entirely fanciful and absurd; though he is careful to add that the Old Testament has indeed been 'greatly corrupted,'[2] in a different way. He objects, not to

[1] 'Grounds and Reasons,' p. 74. This ancient explanation is still given by some orthodox divines, as, for example, by Dr. Farrar, 'Life of Christ,' vol. i. ch. v. Dr. Farrar also believes with Bishop Smalbroke, to whom I shall presently refer, that the Magi may have been guided in their search by astrology (ib. ch. iii.), and his ingenious explanation of the destruction of the swine (ch. xxiii.) may be put beside that of the same prelate. It is only just to add that Dr. Farrar is writing for the edification of the faithful rather than the confutation of unbelievers.

[2] 'Grounds and Reasons,' p. 135.

the statement that the existing text is untrustworthy, but to the notion that the pristine text can be restored. He argues, again, that all Whiston's desperate efforts at remodelling the prophecies fail in making them literally applicable; and he therefore returns to the conclusion that the fulfilment must have been allegorical. He points out, for example, that the prophecy of Christ himself as to his coming again was never fulfilled except in a mystical sense; and he concludes it to be 'most destructive of Christianity to suppose that typical or allegorical arguing is in any respect weak and enthusiastical.'[1] It is apparent, he says, that the Gospel is in every respect founded on type and allegory;' that if the reasoning of the Apostles be tested by the rules used in the schools 'the books of the Old and New Testament will be in an irreconcilable state, and the difficulties against Christianity will be incapable of being solved.'[2] In short, to make out the evidences, we must all become pupils of the learned Surenhusius.

35. Collins's book excited the most vehement controversy that had hitherto taken place. In the preface of his next performance, 'The Literal Scheme of Prophecy considered,' he had the pleasure of giving the titles of thirty-five treatises arising out of the discussion. Whiston defended himself in a singularly absurd treatise. Clarke, and his lieutenant Sykes, joined in the controversy; and more orthodox champions, such as Sherlock, bestirred themselves to repel the rash aggressor. Most prominent amongst these was Edward Chandler, then Bishop of Lichfield. The 'Literal Scheme' was principally a reply to Chandler, and it produced a ponderous rejoinder from the learned Bishop (1728). The two episcopal treatises[3] may perhaps have contributed to Chandler's subsequent elevation to the rich see of Durham in 1730. It was reported, indeed, at the time that his promotion had been facilitated by the payment of a sum of 9,000*l.*[4] To modern readers the treatise will appear to supply a less adequate, though a more respectable, explanation of his honours than the simony. Few

[1] 'Grounds and Reasons,' p. 269. [2] Ib. p. 270.

[3] A 'Defence of Christianity,' and a 'Vindication' of the defence.

[4] He made a pretty good bargain, if we may believe the statement in King's 'Anecdotes' (p. 183), that Chandler of Durham, Willis of Winchester, Potter of Canterbury, Gibson and Sherlock of London, all died 'shamefully rich,' some worth over 100,000*l.* Butler was, he says, a noble exception to the rule.

of the writings in the deist controversy illustrate more pointedly the utter unfitness of the disputants for the task which they undertook so complacently. To a mind free from the prepossessions of his opponents, it will probably appear also that Collins had at almost every point the best of the dispute. His victory was naturally less manifest to his contemporaries. Such reasonings are effective or otherwise according to the assumed data of the problem. By throwing the whole burden of proof upon the assailant, we can bring him down to the level of his antagonist; if the burden be transposed, he has clearly the best of the dispute.

36. Sufficient indications of Chandler's critical weakness appear in his first chapters. He wishes to prove that, at the time of the Christian revelation, there was a general expectation of the coming of the Messiah, and is, of course, unconscious that, given the facts, the argument might be inverted, and that some belief in a coming Messiah is implied by a claim to the Messiahship. He therefore tries to make the most of the Sibylline books. He tells us, with the same air of historical accuracy as though he were speaking of an accident at the Fire of London, that 'the genuine books of the Sibyls, purchased by Tarquin, were burnt with the capitol in Sylla's days.'[1] These books, indeed, he pronounces to have been merely ritual; and he does not deny that the books now known as Sibylline were later Christian forgeries.[2] He is of opinion that there were a number of prophecies current amongst the Greeks in Asia Minor about the time of our Lord's coming, and passing from them to the Romans, which announced the approaching advent of a great king. The substance of these prophecies he discovers in the tenth eclogue of Virgil, and he finds so marked an identity between the pagan poetry and the Jewish prophecies, that he cannot persuade himself that the resemblance was accidental.[3] Virgil, indeed, applied his remarks to the expected heir of Augustus; but his various intimations of a coming golden age of peace, plenty, and righteousness, may be reasonably regarded as dim reflections of Jewish prophecy. In the title of *Deûm Soboles*, conferred by Virgil on his

[1] 'Defence,' p. 9.
[2] 'Vindication,' p. 495.
[3] 'Defence,' p. 12.

patron, he perceives a reference to the Incarnation, or, at least, to the titles bestowed by Jewish prophets on the Messiah. And thus Virgil's flattery to Augustus really consists of the sublime strains of Hebrew poetry, 'dressed up after the Gentile poetic manner.' Chandler would appear to have become a little doubtful of the soundness of his argument, and at the end of the 'Vindication' he tries to effect a retreat in the manner popular with controversialists. He declares, that is, that he leaves his readers to judge of the value to be attached to the resemblance, and that he does not think Christianity 'much concerned'[1] in the decision. Few writers have the courage to withdraw an argument which they know to be inconclusive, so long as it may possibly affect the minds of their readers.

37. The bishop, however, does not shrink, as, indeed, with his notions of critical enquiry, there is no reason why he should shrink, from meeting the challenge thrown down by Collins. Assuming that it is the same thing to prove that a prophecy may cover a certain event, and that it was intended to refer to it, that applicable is equivalent to consciously applied, there can be no difficulty in producing instances of literal fulfilment. Chandler brings forward twelve passages, which he asserts to be instances in point. Some of them are still alleged for the same purpose; and the habit of reading them apart from the context, and in the light of later beliefs, may enable us to understand how such passages were not only put forward in all sincerity and seriousness, as well as rehearsed in the conventional language of theological schools, but in fact seemed to possess real weight. The wire-drawing which is necessary even on this hypothesis may indeed remind us of the learned Surenhusius, and Collins can sometimes refute the bishop by simply repeating his arguments. The argument upon the second prophecy, alleged by the bishop, and Collins's retorts may give a sufficient notion of the whole. The passage is from Malachi: 'Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and of the children to the fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.' This is converted into a literal prophecy of the coming of St.

[1] 'Vindication,' p. 501.

John the Baptist and of Jesus. To make out his case, Chandler has to show that Elias means St. John the Baptist, and that the 'great and terrible day of the Lord' is applicable to the coming of the Messiah. He argues that the Jews always believed, and believed on the strength of this passage, that the coming of Messiah and the coming of Elias would be associated. The Targum on Malachi unluckily says not a word about the Messiah; and he explains its silence by saying that, 'either they thought the passage clear without explication, or they wilfully erased it thence'; a statement which reminds Collins 'of the popish proof of the excellences of the Virgin Mary. She is supposed to have all excellences because the ancients say not a word of her.'[1] The bishop, however, finds a passage in the Targum on Deuteronomy, which helps him to establish the connection in the mind of the Jews. Collins, although disputing the solidarity of all the writers of Targums, admits that the later Jews did in fact join the coming of the Messiah and of Elijah. But how does it follow that Malachi himself could be thinking of the Messiah, to whom it is plain that he makes no direct reference? And granting that Malachi himself meant to connect the two, how does it follow that Elias is represented by John the Baptist? The Jews, says the bishop, ought to have recognised John as Elias, because they admit that prophecy closed with Malachi, and John was the first person in whom it revived. 'These Jews who did not conclude John the Baptist to be Elias, but would have so concluded if they had concluded right, are excellent Jewish testimonies for the bishop.' As an additional argument, the bishop compares the preaching of John with the preaching of Elias, who was to notify the coming of 'that great and dreadful day wherein the Lord Messias' (words, as Collins remarks, interpolated by the bishop to mislead the reader) 'shall smite the land of Jewry with a curse.' If there is any conformity between the two styles of preaching, says Collins, it proves nothing, for any man can use another man's sense. As against these presumptions, he declares, first, that the prophecy announces the return of Elias in person; and, secondly, he suggests that, amongst Jewish authorities, that of John the Baptist must go for something, who expressly

[1] 'Literal Scheme,' p. 122 *et seq.*

denied [1] that he was Elias; and probably denied it in reference to this very prophecy. Finally, John's character, says Collins, is entirely different from that announced in Malachi. He did not precede a terrible day in which the Lord should punish the land of Jewry; nor did he turn the hearts of the fathers to the children. The bishop, indeed, urges that the Messiah may be considered as doing whatever God does, and therefore is inflicting the subsequent calamities of the Jewish race; and that 'in Scripture he is said to do a thing, who doth every thing proper, and likely to cause it, though the effect doth not answer;' and thus a statement that Elias will come and do something, means that a person resembling Elias will come and try to do it. Whatever the value of this interpretation, it is at least plain, as Collins remarks, that a passage which requires such adaptations cannot be said to a literal prophecy.

38. Chandler's argument, indeed, is palpably inadequate as against infidels. If a person starts with a preconceived opinion that Jewish writers were in the habit of making reference to future events as other writers to past events, he might further accept the interpretation put upon Malachi by Chandler. But the primary assumption was, that the deists held the Jewish writers to be ordinary human beings. Chandler might confirm his own belief, but he does not even raise any appreciable presumption against the infidel's belief. This incapacity for appreciating the conditions of the argument is more oddly illustrated in several of Chandler's remarks. He urges, for example, that a prophecy must apply to the Messiah, because it is impossible to discover its fulfilment anywhere else;[2] forgetting, as Collins naturally remarks, that he is arguing against adversaries who are not obliged to admit that it was ever fulfilled at all. A still more curious case of utter oblivion of the principle that an effective argument must rest on some principles common to both parties, occurs in his attempt to prove that Christ's interpretations of the prophecies are of special value, because made before the event. He says that Christ must have been supernaturally inspired to discover from the Jewish prophecies that he was to be crucified; which would indeed be an important remark if the prediction did not rest on the same authority as the fulfilment. And, still

[1] John i. 19–21.

[2] 'Defence,' p. 95.

more curiously, Chandler remarks that 'no man in his wits'[1] could have foretold the resurrection. Yet, he says, Christ foretold this out of the Jewish Scriptures, though we know not from what particular text he inferred it. 'But his rising again so precisely on the third day leaves no room to doubt of the truth of his interpretation.' The hypothesis is apparently that some people might believe that Christ arose on the third day, and yet doubt the authority of the Scriptures. Chandler was not an acute reasoner, but it illustrates the difficulty of the orthodox party in understanding their opponents' position, when an official defender of the faith could put such an argument to an infidel, and especially to an infidel charged with believing that the Scriptures were a simple forgery.

39. In making out his case, Chandler has naturally to resort to the strange devices of the allegorists. He admits the method as fully legitimate. He, of course, finds excellent reasons for supposing that David, Solomon, and Joshua the high-priest were types of the Messiah.[2] He holds that the non-fulfilment of any part of a prophecy in its literal sense is a proof that it must necessarily have a further reference. With the help of the Targums and Maimonides, and by the assumption that the Jews were in the habit of talking about two things at once, and that their God conversed with them in riddles, he has no difficulty in eliciting all kinds of hidden meanings. When a prophet, according to his interpretation, entirely changes the sense of an important word without notice in two successive cases, he thinks that 'nothing is more common in the Scriptures, nor no figure more beautiful in other writers.' When puzzled by the reference in Matthew to the non-discoverable prophecy, 'he shall be called a Nazarene,' he thinks that the evangelist must be speaking of some place in Scripture where the true meaning was 'hid in an equivocal word or expression,' only discoverable after the event; and he accepts the solution put forward by Surenhusius about Netsar, a branch.[3] 'Among the Jews,' he says, 'such a way of writing did prevail. They wrapped up their meaning in riddles, or limited it by words of like sound but different signification; and sometimes implied two or three events in the change of a single letter of the same organ, or

[1] 'Defence,' p. 353. [2] See Zech. vi. 9. [3] 'Defence,' p. 224.

transposition of one or more letters.' In fact, the Holy Ghost sometimes inspired the prophets with a bad pun, which only became intelligible some centuries later. He had excellent reasons for not speaking more plainly; amongst others, that 'had God spoke out at once, that circumcision availed nothing,'[1] that ceremonials generally were to be abolished by the Messiah, and 'the Gentiles taken into covenant without them,' the Jews would not have endured circumcision. In the same spirit, he holds that the star which guided the Magi was, in reality, some eccentric meteor or luminous appearance; and that the Magi, acting on erroneous astrological notions, were accidentally led to a right conclusion. Or perhaps, if they inferred the birth of some great person from their 'Apotelesmatical operations relating to nativities,' it might have been owing to the fact, guaranteed by Grotius, that God is 'sometimes pleased to make use of such practices in high esteem among men, whether grounded upon any or an unwarrantable foundation, and to direct them to give witness to the truth.'[2] To defend Christianity by proving that God makes conundrums, equivocates, tricks people into valueless observances by concealing the fact that they don't please him, and sometimes leads them right by dabbling in astrology, implies a queer state of mind. Will this explanation of the typical prophecies, asks Collins,[3] 'have any other effect than to make people admire, how men can with gravity offer such things as from the great God of heaven and earth?'

40. The prevailing assumption upon which Chandler everywhere proceeds is best illustrated by his argument in regard to Daniel. There he had to deal with a prophecy of the type to which the others could not be made to conform without the 'wire-drawing' of which Collins complains. In treating of them, he applies to predictions of the future the same methods of argument which would be legitimate in examining a history of the past; and assumes that Jewish writers were in the habit of obliquely hinting at something

[1] 'Vindication,' p. 216.

[2] Ib. p. 421. So, Dr. Farrar:—'And, if astrology be ever so absurd, yet there is nothing absurd in the supposition that the Magi should be led to truth, even through the gateways of delusion, if the spirit of sincerity and truth was in them. The history of science will furnish repeated instances,' &c., &c. ('Life of Christ,' vol. i. ch. iii.)

[3] 'Literal Scheme,' p. 283.

that was about to happen many centuries after their death. In the Book of Daniel there is, at least, a definite statement that certain events will happen at a given date; nor is it difficult to discover what was in the mind of the writer. Collins, indeed, had already sufficient critical knowledge at his command to be able to invert the argument. His attack upon the authenticity of Daniel is, perhaps, the most remarkable performance of the deists in the direction of criticism. Collins appears to have been original in his remarks, except so far as the passage from Porphyry suggested the argument; and his reasons, I believe, coincide with those which have satisfied modern critics. Besides recapitulating the reasons which threw doubt upon the authenticity of the document, he had observed that the clear knowledge of events down to the age of Antiochus Epiphanes, and no farther, proved that the writer lived at the time of Antiochus Epiphanes. The remark is, of course, conclusive, from the point of view of historical criticism. Chandler replies partly by denying the fact, and partly by alleging that other prophecies showed the same peculiarity of laying stress upon particular events without going farther. These statements, however, were palpably weak, and certainly would not be accepted by the deists. He labours, therefore, to prove that the clearness of the prophecy is no objection to it, because God can reveal things plainly if he choose; and, finally, that God may discover as much or as little as he pleases. 'The revelation of God,' he says, 'is the measure of the prophet's prediction, and thus God dispenses variously as he sees the circumstances of his people require.'[1] Nothing can be truer, and, therefore, if you have sufficient reason for believing in the divine origin of a given prophecy, it is preposterous to lay down how far it should extend, and with what degree of precision. But to men who are not persuaded of its divine origin, the argument is worthless, or merely amounts to rejecting all internal evidence. Once more it is plain that the discussion is hopeless unless the previous question be settled; and those who came with a foregone conclusion in their minds, in diametrically opposite directions, would discover no crucial test for comparing their rival theories.

[1] 'Vindication,' p. 79.

41. The greater part of Chandler's 'Vindication' is employed in following out this argument as to the authenticity of Daniel into its various branches. It is, of course, antiquated, besides being as feeble, as may be supposed, in argument. When, for example, Collins urges that the Jews often forged books, and more especially in the name of Daniel, Chandler answers the argument by the assertion that, if it amounts to anything, it must mean 'there have been books counterfeited under the name of men of renown; therefore, there can be no genuine books under the same name.'[1] It is needless to follow the discussion further.

42. Men of greater ability than Chandler wrote replies marked by greater logical power. Sherlock skilfully took up a different position in the 'Six Discourses on Prophecy,' which were suggested by, though not professedly aimed against, Collins. In all Sherlock's writings there crops out at intervals a vein of shrewd sense. Here, for example, when noticing the statement of various 'grave and serious authors' that the world is steadily deteriorating, I do not wonder at their judgment, he observes, 'for I find myself every day growing into the same opinion.'[2] Few people, indeed, can distinguish between the opinions that the world is growing dark and that our eyes are growing dim. A genuine logical force is implied in Sherlock's strong perception of the folly of unduly extending the line of defence. The controversy must be brought, as he saw, to some great leading issues, and he declined to be drawn into innumerable questions of petty detail. He is, therefore, anxious to prove that the testimony of prophecy is confirmed by the general tenour of the Jewish history, and not by sporadic texts. The whole story, he urges, can be made intelligible only on the assumption that every previous act led up to the final catastrophe in the appearance of the Messiah. There is, indeed, a difference between Sherlock's conception of what the argument ought to be, and his account of what it really is. He admits the obscurity of the prophecy about bruising the serpent's head, or the reference to Shiloh; and labours rather painfully to make out their bearing. But, regarding them as references to a providential scheme for saving the world from the conse-

[1] 'Vindication,' p. 136. [2] Works, iv. 70.

quences of the Fall, he argues that the completion of that scheme in Christ brings out their full meaning. We are, he says, not to argue that the prophecies expressly designated Christ, but that 'all the notices which God gave to the fathers of his intended salvation are perfectly answered by the coming of Christ.'[1] God did not choose to foretell all the details of his plan; but when the keystone falls into the arch, the meaning of all the preliminary work becomes obvious. In the working out this argument Sherlock is, of course, drawn into some wire-drawing, and discusses the covenants between God and man in that legal and technical spirit which is so curiously marked in the writings of the time. In general conception, however, the argument would be impressive if we were not haunted by a suspicion as to its perfect candour. He veils the concession so skilfully that we are afraid that the process must be more or less conscious. Chandler, he evidently thought, had blundered; but he is not candid enough to risk such an avowal. His retreat—for it is a retreat—is effected under cover of a taunt to his adversaries.

'When unbelievers,' he says, 'hear such reasonings' (as that which professes to discover Christ's character exactly described in the prophecy made to Eve), 'they think themselves entitled to laugh; but their scorn be to themselves. We readily allow that the expressions do not necessarily imply this sense; we allow, further, that there is no appearance that our first parents understood them in this sense, or that God intended that they should so understand them; but since this prophecy has been so plainly fulfilled in Christ, and by the event appropriated to him alone, I would fain know'[2] why, in short, God might not have given a hint, instead of a definite statement; all which, as the deist would imply, merely amounts to saying that there is no reason why God should have given a conclusive proof, and, therefore, amounts to an admission that he did not. Sherlock, in fact, argues that the prophecies were fulfilled, and withdraws, though with a bold front, from the assertion that they could have been fulfilled only by the precise series of events which followed.

43. Here, again, Sykes represents the extreme wing of the orthodox party. Sykes lays the main stress of his argu-

[1] Works, iv. 56. [2] Ib. iv. 57.

ment upon the prophecy in Daniel, though at the same time he declines to pronounce upon its authenticity. In any case he thinks it will be partly prophetical, apparently not seeing that the arguments which fix the date, limit also the application, of the prophecy. Sykes, however, seems less anxious to prove that the prophecies are applicable than to repudiate Collins's insidious argument that the claim of Christ was essentially and exclusively a claim to fulfil the prophecies. Sykes asserts, on the contrary, that that fulfilment is not in any proper sense a proof of the divine authority of the Scriptures. He repudiates, with emphasis and honest indignation, the orthodox subterfuges of a double sense and a typical mode of interpretation. The words 'that it might be fulfilled' mean, according to him, nothing more than that the words are applicable. Collins vigorously opposes him on both points; he insists, though with a different intention, upon the necessity of the orthodox interpretation. Unless it can be shown that the claim discussed is of the essence of the Christian case, his assault would be thrown away. He regarded the doctrine which to Chandler appeared to be a bulwark of Christianity as a convenient *reductio ad absurdum*; and was by no means willing to allow a semi-rationalist to throw over the most assailable portions of his creed, in the hopes of quenching the voracious appetite of the monster Infidelity. The orthodox should not throw their Jonah overboard.

44. The last echo of this controversy may be traced in Bishop Newton's 'Dissertations on the Prophecies.' It did not appear till 1754, and therefore belongs properly to a later generation. The book itself deserves little notice, though it enjoyed a wide popularity. 'It is Tom's great work,' said Dr. Johnson; 'but how far it is great, or how much of it is Tom's, are other questions. I fancy great part of it is borrowed.' 'I believe,' added Johnson, 'he was a gross flatterer.'[1] Of the truth of this last sentiment there will be little doubt in the mind of any reader of Tom's autobiography. It is an admirable, because a thoroughly unconscious, revelation of the character of a genuine prelate of those days. He records, with infinite complacency, the intimacies with great

[1] Boswell, ch. lv.

men which enabled him to worm himself into the high places of the Church. The achievements on which he appears to have chiefly prided himself were certain improvements to his residences. He took down, for example, certain shops which were inconveniently near the deanery of St. Paul's, and built an 'entire new wall,' with gates for the admission of coaches, and an awning over his steps to keep them dry. He triumphs greatly over the expulsion of 'a chimney sweeper and the like' from certain tenements in Scollop Court, and a common sewer which he obtained from the city for Carter Lane.[1] Probably his victory over Collins gave him less heart-felt satisfaction, though it helped to justify his preferment to the bench. The book is a long recapitulation of the prophecies, and the fulfilments ordinarily alleged. The woman's seed which is to bruise the head of the serpent is of course Christ; the prophecies of the downfall of Babylon and Tyre, and of the advent of Cyrus, are given without a moment's fear of historical critics to come; Daniel is triumphantly vindicated from the assaults of Collins, and his predictions declared to be even more complete than later history; whilst the abominations of Rome were satisfactorily detected in the Book of Revelations, and St. Paul's 'man of sin.' His writings edified a later generation of believers; but are rather a summary of past apologetic writings than a contribution to the development of living thought. I mention them here only to avoid the necessity of diverging in a later chapter.

### *V. THE ARGUMENT FROM MIRACLES.*

45. In the last sentence of his 'Literal Scheme,' Collins promised to publish before long 'a discourse upon the miracles recorded in the Old and New Testament.' The design was executed by Thomas Woolston, a Fellow of Sidney Sussex, Cambridge, who frequently refers to Collins, and possibly acted in concert with him. The six discourses on 'the miracles of our Saviour' appeared during the years 1727–8–9. They are a strange attempt to apply to the miracles the same method which Collins had found convenient in assaulting the

[1] Newton's Works, i. 146, 147.

prophecies. The records of miracles were to be shown to be purely allegorical; and whether Woolston intended it or not, the reader would probably consider allegorical as equivalent to fictitious. The difference between the argument in the two cases is obvious. Collins had done his best, and the fact that he did so is the best index to his meaning, to represent the link between the prophecies and the New Testament as essential to Christianity. It was difficult, however, to prove that his argument, even granting its validity in other respects, was so fatal as he represented it to be. The Old and New Testaments might each stand on its own basis, though this connection were dissolved. Collins tried to prove, not that the prophecies were absurd, or the gospel narratives absurd, but that the prophecies did not refer to the narrative. That a prophecy had been fulfilled in the days of Ahaz and not in the days of Christ was a statement not necessarily implying even heterodoxy ; and some of the orthodox were prepared to accept most of his premisses. Woolston, on the other hand, in asserting Christ's miracles to be 'allegorical,' was not trying to dissolve a corroborative link between two parts of Scripture, but was attacking the Scripture itself, and that in its most vital parts. He had to prove, not that Christ's death and resurrection had not been foretold or typically shadowed forth, but that they actually did not occur. The fathers from whom he drew his weapons had indeed frequently, or generally, confined themselves to adding the allegorical meaning without denying the historical truth of the records. Paul does not mean to deny that the story of Hagar and Ishmael was true, when he converts it into his strange allegory. But Woolston maintained that the allegorical was not merely one meaning, but the whole meaning, of the narrative. His argument, therefore, coincided—intentionally or not—with the extreme sceptical view. He declared that the miraculous stories were without a particle of historical truth, though he added, and, as his opponents thought, ironically added, that they had a spiritual truth. The argument was the more offensive because there is no sign that Woolston appreciated the difficulties which may be suggested by criticism, or by *a priori* objections to miracles. His contention is simply that the narratives are on the face of them preposterous. They

are so grotesque that to listen gravely to their recital 'exceeds all power of face.'

46. This strange performance would have been sufficient of itself to raise doubts of its author's sanity. Woolston, born in 1669, had gained a fellowship at Sidney, and there applied himself to the study of Origen. His reverence for that father infected him with a love of allegorising, which appeared in a book called 'The old Apology of the Truth for the Christian Religion against the Jews and Gentiles revived.' This was published in 1705, and it was not till fifteen years later, when he was already above fifty, that he began to give offence by further applications of his doctrine. He lost his fellowship by refusing to reside; and it seems that the study of Origen, or some other cause, had disordered his intellect.[1] In 1722 he began to publish his 'Free Gifts to the Clergy,' which bear at every page the marks of insanity.[2] They are wild rants about the necessity of allegorising the Scriptures, showing that the present hireling preachers, who have basely conspired against him, are worshippers of the Apocalyptical beast, and ministers of Antichrist. He declares that Origen has been pleased to say of him, in the book against Celsus, that he is 'best skilled of any man in the spirit of prophecy;'[3] and, in short, he talks the language of an inhabitant of Bedlam. Unable to provoke an answer to his ravings, he answered himself in the character of a Country Curate. Soon afterwards, on occasion of the controversy provoked by Collins, he published a book called 'The Moderator between an Infidel and an Apostate.' If less obviously insane, it is equally preposterous. In his character of moderator, Woolston accepts Collins's theory that an allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament is necessary, and gives to it the sense that the supposed types had no historical reality. He ridicules, for example, the story of Christ's ride into Jerusalem upon an ass, which, he says, is ridiculous in an historical point of view, and might obviously have been done by an impostor to fulfil the prophecy; but he discovers its fulfilment in a mysterious

[1] See 'Free Gifts to the Clergy,' No. i. p. 50, where he prays God to continue him 'in that state of reason he has been graciously pleased to restore me to.'

[2] See *e.g.* iii. p. 68, for his characteristic belief that a conspiracy had been formed to ruin his reputation.

[3] 'Free Gifts,' i. 29.

reference to the second advent[1]—the ass representing the Church, and so on. In this book Woolston said that it was not his intention, though it would have been in his power, to expose the absurdity of attributing historical reality to the miracles of Christ.[2] In 1727, however, and the three following years, he published his 'Six Discourses,' in which this plan was systematically carried out. How far his rickety brain had recovered such equilibrium as it ever possessed is not clear, nor is it a question of any importance. His contemporaries settled the matter after their own fashion, by fining him 100*l.*, and putting him in prison for a year. The poor man died in the King's Bench in 1733, not being able to pay his fine. His last words were expressive of calm resignation; and he supported himself partly by an allowance of 30*l.* a year made by his brother, and partly by the sale of his pamphlets, after paying the 'not inconsiderable' expenses incurred by his publishers. It is to be said to the honour of Clarke and Whiston that they attempted to save him from penal consequences, and warnings were not wanting[3] that such persecution acted as an advertisement. Whiston says, what is probable enough, that at the end of his life the poor man did not know whether he was a Christian or not. But it must be added, in fairness, that his insults to Christianity were such as might naturally cause the indignation of an age not so scrupulous as our own in discriminating between the shades of mental alienation which relieve a criminal of responsibility. Some of his discourses, too, and the insulting dedications to the bishops, seem to imply that the allegorical mask was more or less consciously assumed to conceal an offensive aim.

47. Through six straggling discourses, Woolston attempts

[1] 'Moderator,' p. 124, &c. The difference between this and the modern mythical view is that Woolston attributes to conscious deceit what modern critics regard as an unconscious embodiment in external types of an internal state of mind.

[2] Ib. p. 49.

[3] See preface to poor Simon Browne's 'Fit Rebuke to a Ludicrous Infidel.' Simon Browne was the unfortunate dissenter who suffered under the singular delusion that his 'thinking substance' had been annihilated. See his curious dedication to Queen Caroline in the 'Adventurer,' No. 88, which was suppressed by his friends. See also Lardner's very honourable correspondence with Bishop Waddington (Works, i. lxiii.)

to make fun of the miracles. There are, at intervals, queer gleams of distorted sense, and even of literary power, in the midst of his buffoonery. Occasionally he hits a real blot; more frequently he indulges in the most absurd quibbles, and throughout he shows almost as little approximation to a genuine critical capacity as to reverential appreciation of the beauty of many of the narratives. He is a mere buffoon jingling his cap and bells in a sacred shrine; and his strange ribaldry is painful even to those for whom the supernatural glory of the temple has long utterly faded away. Even where some straggling shreds of sense obtrude themselves, the language is obtrusively coarse, and occasionally degenerates into mere slang. Had Jesus, he says, been accused of bewitching a flock of sheep as he did the swine, 'our laws, and judges, too, of the last age would have made him to swing for it.'[1] He suggests that the wise men had better have 'brought their dozens of sugar, soap, and candles,'[2] instead of myrrh and frankincense. He thinks it strange 'that no Jews or infidels have as yet ludicrously treated "the story of the Samaritan woman" to the almost confutation of our religion;' and declares that, 'if such a broken, elliptical and absurd tale had been told of any other impostor in religion, the wits of the clergy would have been at work to expose it plentifully; and indeed,' he adds, 'there's no need of much wit to make this tale nauseous and ridiculous to vulgar understandings.'[3] He then goes on to compare Christ to a gipsy, or 'strolling fortune-teller,' and is 'glad to hear of no money he squeezed out of them for the exercise of his prophetic art, which our divines would have made an argument of their divine right to tithes, fees, and stipends, for their divinations.'[4] His comments on other miracles are a mere running fire of such strange, unseemly fooling. When he wishes to exceed these bounds, he puts his arguments into the mouth of an imaginary rabbi, who, for example, suggests, in the coarsest language, that Jesus and his mother were probably drunk at the marriage in Cana, and ventures, indeed, still grosser imputations on the character of the Virgin. The same imaginary ally is brought in to assail the truth of the resurrection, and argues that the whole affair was an elaborate cheat got up by the disciples.

[1] Dis. i. 34. [2] Ib. p. 56. [3] Ib. ii. 48. [4] Ib. p. 55.

If Jesus, he says, 'according to his own evangelists, was arraigned for a deceiver and blasphemer, in pretending to the sonship and power of God by his miracles, in all probability this piece of fraud in Lazarus was one article of the indictment against him ; and what makes it very likely is that the chief priests and Pharisees, from the date of this pretended miracle—the raising of Lazarus—took counsel together to put him to death, not clandestinely or tumultuously to murder him, but judicially to punish him with death, which, if they proved their indictment by credible and sufficient witnesses, he was most worthy of.' [1]

48. The device by which such utterances as these are to be reconciled to the faith in Christianity, which Woolston asserted himself to retain, is explained in a singular profession of faith in the fifth discourse. He declares that 'at bottom' he is 'as sound as a rock.' [2] He believes that 'the ministry of the letter of the Old and New Testament is downright anti-Christianism,' and that, to oppose the allegorical and spiritual interpretation, is the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. In accordance with this, he sees in the marriage at Cana, for example, the mystical union of Christ and his Church ; the want of wine means the deficiency of the Holy Spirit ; the good wine substituted for the bad means the substitution of spiritual for literal interpretations. Moses is the governor of the feast, and all the fowls of the air are to be invited—meaning all spiritual and heavenly-minded Christians.[3] In defence of these theories, he quotes [4] Augustine and other fathers, and he pledges himself to endeavour to get rid both of literal interpreters and of a hireling ministry which maintains them. Though he does not expect long to survive the accomplishment of so great and glorious a work, he is transported with his anticipation of the happiness that awaits mankind when the 'ecclesiastical vermin' have been extirpated from God's house, and of the paradisaical state which will ensue.

49. What would have been the proper answer to these strange tirades? A contemptuous silence, or a simple expression of regret that too much learning had disordered their author's mind ; or, if more was wanted, a setting forth of

[1] Dis. v. 51. [2] Ib. p. 68. [3] Ib. iv. 47. [4] Ib. v. 70.

those spiritual beauties of the miracles, in presence of which, the blemishes noted by Woolston could be passed over as mere infinitesimal blots on the divine purity of the narrative? None of these methods seem to have commended themselves to the ardent controversialists of the day. They solved the problem which seems to have puzzled Solomon, as to the right method of dealing with a fool, by adopting the least appropriate of his alternatives. They accepted Woolston's challenge, and argued at length the issues which he had suggested. Apologists are seldom sufficiently awake to the danger of a purely defensive line of argument. They think that they can give a sufficient answer in detail to every one of the objections urged, and they forget that the total impression left upon the mind of the reader is apt to be that, where so much requires to be explained away, there must be something which cannot really be explained away. Such must have been the main conclusion which would have suggested itself to the readers of the most ponderous and learned reply opposed to the 'Six Discourses.' Woolston had dedicated the third discourse to Richard Smalbroke, bishop of St. David's, a prelate who may be ranked one degree lower than his brother dignitary, Bishop Chandler. The bishop, it seems, had published what Woolston calls a 'vile and slanderous sermon;'[1] in which reference was made to the first two discourses. Woolston declares that his lordship, instead of reading them, must have taken the report of them on trust from some 'ecclesiastical noodle,' and challenges him to an open discussion. 'You must expect,' he says, 'to be teazed and insulted from the press if you will not enter the lists against me.'

50. Thus provoked, the bishop apparelled himself in his ponderous panoply of learning, and engaged in unequal contest with his insolent antagonist. It was a strange conflict—a fight between clown and pantaloon—on one side, learning distorted to strange ends by semi-insanity, and on the other, wielded by senile incompetence. Painfully and wearily Smalbroke plods through the various cavils raised by the scoffer, and gives his answer in detail. Sometimes he confines himself to repeating the recognised arguments, and there he

[1] Dis. iii. vi.

is of course tolerably safe; but he has an unfortunate itch for originality, and then uniformly blunders into absurdity. His credulity is curious and almost touching. He does not like to attack even a heathen miracle. He is not quite clear whether the miracles of Apollonius 'were wrought by evil spirits, or were downright cheat and imposture.'[1] On the agency of devils, indeed, he is especially strong, and much resents Woolston's attempt to deprive 'Satan and hell of all real existence.'[2] Can Mr. Woolston, he asks, 'be so very ignorant as not to have discovered both in the ancient philosophy, as well as the vulgar mythology, those inferior gods; that, though they were devils in disguise, assumed to themselves divine worship, and were styled Δαίμονες, *dæmons*?'[3] He quotes Arnobius and Origen to show that the devils were in a state of special activity about the time of our Lord's coming, which accounts for the frequent mention of them in the Gospels, and he calls in the learned Bartholine to give reasons for this infernal agitation.[4] That excellent judge attributes the diabolical fermentation either to the Jewish taste for magic, or to the fact that Jehovah was punishing them for their sins; to which Smalbroke adds, as his own suggestion, that the devils were probably let loose in order to afford a more signal triumph to the Saviour. Since that day, the Devil has been kept in much better order; but though we know not 'under what regulations the evil spirits may be now restrained,'[5] we have too much reason to infer from such phenomena as Woolston that they are very active, though they behave 'in a more clandestine and artful manner than in more ancient times.' The matter of fact simplicity with which he accepts the accounts of diabolic agency was most curiously illustrated by an argument which involved him in a good deal of ridicule. Arguing in defence of the miracle at Gadara, he observes that it might be very proper to terrify the inhabitants of that country for their obstinate infidelity;[6] 'so that even this permission of Jesus to the evil spirits was amply compensated by casting a whole legion of devils out of one person—that is, by suffering about three of them to enter into each hog, instead of about six thousand of them keeping possession of one man.' Never,

[1] 'Vindication of Miracles,' i. 18.
[2] Ib. p. 343.
[3] Ib. p. 344.
[4] Ib. p. 348.
[5] Ib. p. 349.
[6] Ib. p. 203.

we may believe, either before or since, was the rule of three applied to so strange a problem. Are six thousand devils in one man better or worse than three devils in each of two thousand pigs? This bit of arithmetic seems to have earned for the bishop the sobriquet of 'split-devil.'[1]

51. If the notions of historical evidence which could find access to a mind in this stage require further illustration, we may examine his answer to another difficulty raised by Woolston. If, said that scoffer, you insist upon the literal sense elsewhere, why not insist upon it in regard to the promise of removing mountains by faith? And how do you know, retorts Smalbroke, that mountains have not been removed by faith? Jerome says that Hilarion did actually remove mountains. Chrysostom, 'a very rational father, and consequently not over-credulous,'[2] tells us that some (indefinite) holy persons, far inferior to the Apostles, are reported to have removed mountains. Nyssen assures us that Gregory Thaumaturgus moved a vast stone or rock; and even Marco Polo '(whose credibility, in geography at least, is more and more established by later discoveries)' tells us that a Christian removed a mountain in Persia at 'a very critical juncture.' At any rate, it is 'certain that they (the apostles) performed much greater miracles, and therefore had power' to move mountains if necessary.[3] The indiscriminating acceptance of authority implied in this passage shows that Smalbroke was still, for all practical purposes, living in a past epoch. His favourite medical authorities are Ader and Bartholine, two distinguished physicians of the seventeenth century, who had written upon the diseases mentioned in the Bible, and who are quoted to prove the reality of diabolical possession. The bishop's own medical acquirements were probably about on a level with those of Molière's doctors, if we may judge from his quoting Hippocrates to prove that paralytics lose the power of motion, 'because the body is paralytical and without motion and weak.'[4] He is cautious in rejecting Hammond's rationalising theory, that the healing powers of the Pool of Bethesda were due to

[1] Disney's 'Life of Sykes,' p. 248. The bishop was so fond of this argument that he inserted it in spite of the entreaties of Bishops Chandler and Gibson. See 'Newton's Life,' Works, i. 29.

[2] 'Vindication,' &c. p. 443. [3] Ib. p. 446. [4] Ib. i. 542.

the 'blood and ordure of the entrails of sacrificed beasts,' which were stirred up by a messenger of the high priest for the benefit of invalids. He thinks that this process could not be 'reasonably supposed to cure all manner of diseases,' though it might be 'proper enough' in some. However, he convinces himself, with the help of the 'famous Bartholine' and his like, that some of the diseases cured by Christ were really caused by demons, and that all were too serious to have been cured by imagination alone. Indeed, the eminent Fienus wrote an entire treatise on this subject, showing that 'fancy or imagination cannot of itself cure any diseases;'[1] and, as we have seen, it could still less create demons. In one or two cases, Smalbroke is forced to speak rather harshly of ecclesiastical authorities. St. Augustine used on one occasion an 'expression that is highly indecent in itself, and unworthy of his own piety;'[2] for the father, not living in days when destructive criticism had become a terror, had ventured to say of the miracle of cursing the fig-tree, that this 'fact, unless it be understood in a figurative sense, is foolish.' Generally, however, he is able to satisfy himself that the fathers did not mean by allegorising a narrative to deny that it had also a literal truth. Indeed, he says with great force, that 'if miraculous facts have no real existence, they cannot be types;'[3] nor, for that matter, can they be anything else; though why a fiction should not be typical does not quite appear.

52. The arguments are perhaps about worthy of the cavils, and, in truth, the whole phenomenon excites our disgust more powerfully than our sense of absurdity. The irreverence of Voltaire has its noble side; the coarser brutalities of Tom Paine express, at least, the revolt of a vigorous common sense against a hide-bound orthodoxy; but in Woolston there seems to be no particular conviction or intelligible purpose. He takes a morbid delight in giving scandal, and only leaves us in doubt whether his profanity was a symptom of lunacy, or one of those methods of pandering to vicious popular tastes by which the lower denizens of Grub Street picked up a precarious living. The bishop's performance is less mysterious: no age has hitherto been wanting in pedants

[1] 'Vindication of Miracles,' i. 291.
[2] Ib. p. 414.
[3] Ib. i. 441.

in whom some mechanical contrivance for scholastic quibbling seems to have taken the place of the reasoning brain. In itself, the episode scarcely justifies detailed notice. It is as though some idiot had suddenly turned Berserker, and plunged recklessly and aimlessly into the fight. But the mere fact that such a controversy could take place was significant. Voltaire was studying the manners and customs of the English at the time when these strange discourses were being published. Happy the country—that seems to have been his general conclusion -where even a Woolston meets with so little serious persecution that he can pick up a living by the sale of his profanities. No abstract theories of toleration, however, would have saved Woolston from sharper punishment if zeal had not grown cooler since the opening of the century. When a struggle was going on which involved such desecration of holy things for the amusement of coffee-house cliques, and amidst the indifference of more exalted politicians, men like Berkeley and Butler were rightly alarmed at the symptoms. Much strong and probably exaggerated language might be quoted from contemporaries as to the rapid decay of belief. It would be impossible to decide, and it is beyond my present purpose to enquire, what weight should be attributed to such judgments. Though a decay was clearly taking place, it seems to be very doubtful whether any considerable class sympathised even faintly with the deists. But the nation was clearly in a state of mind dangerous for the interests of orthodoxy. The mere discussion of such topics tended to destroy old associations ; and the mode of discussion was conspicuously injudicious. A conviction of this danger shows itself in a characteristic phase of apologetic literature.

53. The orthodox party performed, it may be said, a movement of concentration. Men whose brains had not shrivelled into mere parchment saw the necessity of bringing matters to a more definite issue. It was necessary to put a stop to this endless haggling over innumerable details, and bring forward some clear, crushing, and unequivocal proofs. An attempt was therefore made to apply, with wider knowledge and clearer view of the difficulties involved, a method substantially identical with that of Leslie. Prove distinctly the intervention of supernatural power in any case, and the

presumption against miracles would vanish. Apply the argument in particular to that fact which is at once the most important to Christianity, and supported by the most varied testimony, and the victory would be won. Though the more obvious blots would no longer be shielded from view by the humble reverence of the faithful, they might be overlooked when such stories were a trifling corollary from the greater manifestations of Divine power. The fate of Christianity, in short, might be staked on the proof of the resurrection. The argument was, for a time, triumphant, and the impression was deep and durable. Bishop Watson, for example, who had to encounter Gibbon and Tom Paine, tells us that the corner-stone of his faith was the overwhelming evidence in favour of the resurrection.[1] It is true, indeed, that any man who was convinced of the truth of that narrative would inevitably accept the Christian religion. Such doubts as might remain would be doubts as to the authenticity of certain passages, not as to the divine authority of the Gospels. The real objection to the method is the impossibility of fairly testing the evidence in this isolated case without taking into account the results of infinitely wider enquiries. The answer to this central problem once found, you have the clue to guide you through the whole labyrinth of the world; but it is equally true that the answer cannot be found till the whole labyrinth has been surveyed with all scientific precautions. The secret cannot be summarily guessed, but must be gradually unravelled by a slow series of elaborate enquiries. This view marks, in another sense, a turning point in the controversy. The miracles, it is plain, are beginning to be felt to be encumbrances rather than supports to the faith. We are asked to accept them as corollaries from a system of belief, not to ground our beliefs upon them. The more serious examination of the evidence, inadequate as were the methods applied, began to rouse attention to the general canons of enquiry. No satisfactory conclusion could be reached as to the truth of the resurrection narrative without asking under what circumstances miracles could be accepted as credible; nor could that question be raised without infinitely wider discussions as to the constitution of the universe and the nature

[1] Watson's 'Anecdotes,' i. 23.

of human progress. We are still in the day of small things, but the most significant question has been put.

54. A book in which this tendency appeared was the answer to Woolston by the amiable and accomplished Zachary Pearce, who afterwards held the deaneries of Winchester and Westminster, and the bishoprics of Bangor and Rochester. He appears to have shown some reluctance in accepting preferment, and a genuine desire to abandon it. He was allowed, at the age of seventy-eight, to resign his deanery, though the resignation of a bishopric at any age was regarded as too preposterous to be permitted. His conciliatory temper was evidenced not only by the mildness of his language towards the arrogant Bentley,[1] but by his moderation towards the offensive buffooneries of Woolston. His answer may be taken as a good statement of the orthodox argument as it appeared to the more cultivated thinkers of the time. It is, of course, marked by the blemishes from which none of them were quite free. To prove the reality of demoniacal possession, Pearce quotes Josephus, Plutarch, Lucian, and Philostratus, as believing in devils; Josephus having actually witnessed an exorcism in the presence of Vespasian.[2] Pearce writes like a man discussing the real existence of the Dodo, and could not adduce the testimony of his authors more confidently if they had actually seen and handled living specimens of the genus. The argument illustrates the common persuasion of the apologists, that they were confirming a story when they were explaining its origin. The superstition, that is, was adduced to prove the reality of its objects—an argument that was soon inverted with great effect by Middleton. In other cases, he condescends to the legal quibbles by which divines were then in the habit of justifying the Almighty. Jesus, he suggests, did not order, but only permitted, the devils to enter the swine;[3] and he had a right to wither another man's fig-tree, because the whole land was under forfeiture for the wickedness of its inhabitants.[4]

His main point, as already noticed, is the credibility of

[1] He wrote against Bentley's proposals for the new edition of the Greek Testament, and against his edition of Milton. See Life of Pearce, prefixed to his Commentary on the Gospels, written by himself, and edited by Johnson.

[2] 'Miracles of Jesus Vindicated,' p. 40.

[3] Ib. p. 36.

[4] Ib. p. 52.

the resurrection. Assume that central miracle to be well established, and every other becomes possible, and indeed highly probable. The Apostles, as he rather superfluously argues, had the strongest motives for not reporting any false miracles, the detection of which would have ruined their character. 'Here then,' he says, 'is not only a reasonable presumption, but a strong consequence, in favour of all the miracles which are attributed to Jesus in the Gospels; every impartial man must believe the literal account of them to be true, and the miracles to have been real ones; unless it can be clearly made out that there is an absolute impossibility in any of them.'[1] The presumption against the marvellous is inverted, and should any difficulties occur, we have to remember that many things may appear to us strange or absurd which were perfectly obvious and familiar to the Jews.

55. The argument erected upon this platform is simple enough, and is conceived in the spirit of Leslie's 'Short Method.' The Apostles cannot have been deceived themselves, because they had ample opportunities of investigation.[2] It is 'morally impossible' that they should have been deceivers, because they had nothing to gain by it;[3] and because 'the whole number of the Apostles unanimously asserted this fact' . . . 'in the midst of all kinds of sufferings and persecutions, even with their dying breath and when expiring under the cruellest torments.'[4] It is characteristic, by the way, that Pearce assumes as an indisputable fact that we have the 'dying words' of all the Apostles, when we know nothing certainly of the death of any one. The only objections noticed are, first, that Jesus did not rise at the time foretold; secondly, that some of his disciples did not know him; thirdly, that he did not appear to the chief priests; and, fourthly, that the seal on the grave not being broken in presence of the sealers, there is room to suspect imposture. The familiar answers are given to the first difficulties. To the third he replies that the priests could have given no better evidence than the Apostles, and that infidels would have found reason for cavilling, though the whole nation had been

[1] 'Miracles Vindicated,' p. 21.
[2] Ib. p. 2.
[3] Ib. p. 3.
[4] Ib. p. 4.

converted. To the last objection he replies that the Apostles had entered into no covenant about the seal, and that there was no mark of fraud 'when God, the only proprietor, was present at the opening of it.'[1] These last arguments evade the force of a difficulty, which, however, lies too much outside of any modern line of argument to be worth consideration. One hypothesis remains, which Pearce very speedily dispatches. The Apostles, it seems, had been accused of 'enthusiasm.' Pearce replies, in substance, that the evidence upon which they acted was the strongest possible testimony of their senses, and not any supposed impulse. 'If we allow,' he says, 'that, even as to facts themselves, enthusiasm may so far impose upon a man as to make him believe a lie, nay to be strongly persuaded of the truth of it, yet it can never make him work real miracles in order to persuade others of the belief of it.'[2] Which is true enough, though it is hard to see how it is relevant. If the Apostles were liable to delusion, where is the evidence of the miracles? Pearce is here rather vague, but his general view is simply that of Paley and the whole generation of evidence collectors. The facts alleged admitted of so easy a test that it is impossible to suppose a mistake, whatever the hypothesis as to the mental condition of the witnesses, whilst it is unhesitatingly assumed that we have their original testimony.

56. The vein of argument thus opened was worked by several more popular, if not more powerful, writers than Pearce. The most characteristic contribution to this, or perhaps to any part of the controversy, was Sherlock's 'Trial of the Witnesses,' which appeared in 1729. Sherlock, who had just received the bishopric of Bangor, had been for some years Master of Catherine Hall, at Cambridge, and was one of the many able men who illustrated the university at the beginning of the century. Like Pearce he had been more or less involved in the complicated warfare stirred up by the illimitable pugnacity of Bentley, and, like other prelates of his time, he failed to take a very unworldly view of the priestly office. He was a sturdy, vigorous, prosaic man, with an eye to preferment, and with a strong touch of the lawyer in his composition. This last peculiarity was, perhaps, brought out by

[1] 'Miracles Vindicated,' p. 13. [2] Ib. p. 20.

his position as Master of the Temple, an appointment which he held for near fifty years. His legal acquirements gave him such weight in the university that he was nicknamed 'Cardinal Alberoni' by Bentley; and in the House of Lords he held his own against the luminaries of the rival profession. As a writer he has touches of genuine power, and his style is invariably clear and masculine. The 'Trial of the Witnesses' is perhaps his best performance. It ran through fourteen editions in a short time, and may even now be read with pleasure by the literary critic. It is still more interesting to the historian of opinion, as giving in a curiously characteristic shape, and within a brief compass, the pith of the orthodox argument. It is the concentrated essence of eighteenth-century apologetic theology. Its form is significant, and the argument throughout manly and to the purpose, and free from the petty quibbling which disfigures so much contemporary controversy. Here, too, we are at the very centre of the orthodox position. From this fortress they defied with most success the assaults of the deists; and upon their discomfiture in this part of the field is chiefly founded the general impression that they were hopelessly defeated.

57. The pamphlet affects to be the report of a mock trial which takes place at one of the Inns of Court. Some lawyers agree to appoint a judge and counsel and empannel a jury. The Apostles are charged with giving false evidence in the case of the resurrection of Jesus. After an animated discussion by counsel, the judge sums up, and a verdict of not guilty is returned. As the judge is retiring, a gentleman offers him a fee. 'A fee to a judge is a bribe,' he replies. 'True, sir,' said the gentleman, 'but you have resigned your commission, and will not be the first judge who has come from the bench to the bar without any diminution of honour. Now Lazarus's case is to come on next, and this fee is to retain you on his side.'[1] The judge had, in fact, shown his qualifications as an advocate a little too plainly; and yet, within the limits accepted by mutual consent, the case is undoubtedly a very strong one, and nothing can better exhibit the artificial nature of the whole controversy, as then under-

[1] Sherlock's Works, vol. v. 223.

stood, than the mode in which it is treated by this imaginary court.

58. After a brief discussion between the counsel, the judge decides, with legal precision, that as the matter before the court is not the truth of the Christian religion, but the value of Mr. Woolston's objection to the resurrection, it is for the counsel for the prosecution to open the case. 'You see,' he says, 'evidence of the resurrection is supposed to be what it is on both sides, and the thing immediately in judgment is the value of the objections, and, therefore, they must be set forth. The court will be bound to take notice of the evidence which is admitted as a fact on both parts.'[1] This is an explicit statement of the assumptions involved in the whole apologetic literature. The problem proposed to the infidel is no less than this: given the accuracy of the whole Gospel narrative, except where it can be shown to rest upon hearsay, to show how the facts may be explained by fraud or 'enthusiasm.' After a little sparring, the counsel for Woolston suggests that Jesus originated a fraud, which was carried on by his disciples. The counsel for the Apostles replies by insisting upon the extreme improbability that Jesus was carrying on a plot to be made a king, as proved by his declining to make use of the Jewish anticipations of an earthly monarchy or to take advantage of their enthusiasm to excite a rising. It is impossible that he should have carried on his deception when his death was the necessary consequence; and when he foretold his resurrection, he put the truth of his mission to a crucial test. The circumstances of the case exclude the suspicion of mere enthusiasm and 'heated imagination,' for the body was certainly missing. 'There must of necessity have been either a real miracle or a great fraud in this case.'[2] Here the counsel for Woolston is driven to amend his plea. There may, he urges, have been 'enthusiasm in the master which occasioned the prediction and fraud in the servants who put it in execution.'[2] This leads to a fresh argument. The deist admits fully the reality of the death and burial. The agreement, he says, was made between the chief priests and Apostles to seal the grave, and the disappearance of the body, in the absence of one of the parties to the agreement, is a

[1] Sherlock, v. 155. [2] Ib. p. 170.

sufficient proof of fraud. This hypothesis is again assailed by the counsel for the defence. He goes through the various circumstances in detail, and argues that fraud was impossible, and that the conduct of the chief priests, who tried to silence the Apostles, instead of charging them with fraud, is sufficient proof that they were themselves conscious of the falsehood of their own story.[1] A further argument follows, including a remarkable digression as to the value of evidence in the case of alleged miracles, and tending to show that the evidence of Jesus's appearances as a living man after his burial is amply sufficient and all that could be reasonably demanded. Admitting even that the story is in itself improbable, he urges that the miraculous powers of the Apostles, and their willingness to encounter death in defence of their cause, gives special value to their testimony. A summing up follows, with the verdict already recorded.

59. Sherlock's argument is triumphant. Grant his assumptions, and his conclusions inevitably follow. Admit, what the deists scarcely contested, that the Gospels were really the work of the men whose names they bear; assume further—what seems to have been tacitly admitted on all hands—that a new religion is accepted because the converts are won by weight of evidence, as English jurymen are convinced in a criminal trial; admit, again, that the Apostles showed their sincerity by adhering to their creed in spite of persecution, and in opposition to their plainest interests; and admit, finally, that there is no *a priori* presumption against the truth of a miraculous story, and what ground remains for disputing the Gospel narratives? If Sherlock and eleven other bishops had been burnt at Smithfield because they persisted in asserting that Queen Anne was dead, that they had actually seen her die, and held a *post-mortem* examination; and if there was no evidence to the contrary, and no reason for doubting their opportunities of observation, would any reasonable man have rejected their testimony? That was substantially the mode in which the truth of Christ's resurrection was argued; and it is no wonder that the Christian advocates boasted, with some plausibility, of a complete success. There were, indeed, two distinct causes for doubt.

[1] Sherlock, v. 182.

There was the growing incredulity as to the reality of miracles, and there were certain rudimentary symptoms of the tendency which developed with time into genuine historical criticism. The argument against miracles presently assumed great prominence. Sherlock treats it with more distinctness than any of his fellow-apologists. This topic becomes more prominent in the next stage of the controversy. It is, however, worth noticing, that Sherlock anticipates the substance of the reasoning, so frequently elaborated by later writers. The argument of the deist, he says, comes substantially to this: that we are not to admit the testimony of others except 'in such matters as appear probable, or at least possible, to our conceptions.'[1] This rule would lead us, according to the familiar illustration, to disbelieve the freezing of rivers if we lived in a hot country. The death of a man, and the fact that he is subsequently alive, are both matters which may be fairly established by evidence. The assertion that this or other such cases are 'contrary to the course of nature,' means merely that they are contrary to the inferences which we have drawn from observation. 'When men talk of the course of nature, they really talk of their own prejudices and imaginations,'[2] and, in assuming that things cannot be otherwise than we have known them to be, 'we outrun the information of our senses, and the conclusion stands on prejudice, not on reason.'[2] Thus we know that all men die and rise no more, and we infer rightly that a resurrection is 'contrary to the uniform and settled course of things. But if we argue from hence that it is contrary and repugnant to the real laws of nature, and absolutely impossible on that account, we argue without any foundation to support us either from our senses or our reason.'[2] When we consider how ignorant we are of the nature and causes of the simplest vital phenomena, we must see our incapacity for pronouncing upon the absolute possibility or impossibility of a resurrection. Admitting, therefore, that cases of this kind 'require more evidence to give them credit than ordinary cases do,'[3] Sherlock denies that they are beyond the power of evidence to establish.

60. The evangelists were thus triumphantly acquitted;

[1] Sherlock, v. 190. [2] Ib. p. 192. [3] Ib. p. 191.

and even Sherlock's opponents admitted the plausibility of his case. But such controversy never converts; at most, it perplexes an antagonist, and, very likely, it drives him to a more extreme position. Produce the plainest evidence of eye-witnesses to a fact, and there must always be one mode of evading its force—namely, by assuming that the witnesses are guilty of perjury. In the case of ancient written testimony, where no collateral evidence can be procured, and the witnesses are all on one side, such an imputation cannot be directly repelled. A man who could believe the evangelists to be deliberate liars was simply impervious to Sherlock's logic. Such a writer appeared several years later, though it is a symptom of the declining interest of the controversy that his brutal plain-speaking excited so little interest. Peter Annet was the last and least generally known of the deist writers. He attacked Sherlock's 'Trial' in a pamphlet published in 1744, called 'The Resurrection of Jesus examined by a Moral Philosopher.' In a few other pamphlets he carried on the controversy excited by this performance; and some years later—in 1762—another pamphlet, called the 'Free Inquirer,' brought its unlucky author to the pillory. As Annet was a schoolmaster, it is not surprising that he was ruined by the scandal excited; and edifying stories were told of his being driven to accept charity at the hands of the benevolent Archbishop Secker. He died in 1768.[1] Annet is noticeable as a link between the older deist writers and the virulence of Tom Paine. His pages have a touch of the revolutionary antipathy to Christianity. One of his pamphlets, on 'Social Bliss,' is a plea for liberty of divorce, which, though borrowed in part from Milton, and, like Milton's, the fruit of personal experience, expresses the true anti-social theory of the subversive school. In his deist writings Annet is to Sherlock

[1] Some years later he appears to have taken part in a curious little controversy. The dissenter, S. Chandler, had preached a sermon upon the death of George II., containing a parallel between that monarch and King David. An anonymous pamphlet, called 'The History of the Man after God's own heart,' and attributed to Annet, was published 'merely to show' (as the preface asserts) 'how the memory of the British monarch is insulted by the comparison.' A brief discussion sprang up; but it is interesting only as the original pamphlet—which is really well written—seems to have supplied the hint for one of Voltaire's keenest satires, the drama of 'Saul' (1763). The attribution of the pamphlet to Annet is perhaps doubtful.

what an abusive Old Bailey barrister is to a dignified advocate. He cross-examines the evangelists with a cynical audacity. He spares no imputations, sticks at no cavils, and bullies and browbeats as if he had to deal with convicted felons. He is as coarse as Woolston, and no crazy regard to allegory muffles the force of his blows. Woolston, he says, failed because he granted too much.[1] Annet, therefore, grants nothing. The witnesses are treated as vulgar cheats and impostors, acting from the vilest of motives.

61. Annet was attacked by Samuel Chandler, Jackson, and the inevitable Leland, and by an anonymous defender of Sherlock's, who was possibly Sherlock himself;[2] but his chief enemies were a pair of distinguished laymen, whose books, conceived in the same spirit as Sherlock's, enjoyed a considerable reputation. Gilbert West, an amiable man and a decent versifier, was settled in a quiet house at Wickham, where he frequently received the visits of Pitt and Lyttelton. These statesmen, we are told, had listened to 'the blandishments of infidelity,' and their restoration to the true faith was in some measure due to West's arguments. Lyttelton became not merely a disciple, but an imitator. He did for the conversion of St. Paul what West did for the resurrection of Christ. West's 'Observations on the Resurrection,' published in 1747, obtained for the author the degree of Doctor of Laws from the University of Oxford. It is a naïve recapitulation of the ordinary argument. Having first harmonised the narratives, by assuming that to two differing accounts there must always correspond two events, he treats the whole as the agreeing testimony of eye-witnesses, whose good faith is proved by their sufferings. It easily follows that 'there never was a fact more fully proved.'[3] His theory may be summed up in a passage curiously characteristic of the school.

The Apostles, it must be observed, had set about their investigation in the spirit of judicious, though untrained, enquirers. 'It is observable,' he remarks,[4] 'that all these

[1] 'Collection of Tracts,' p. 271.
[2] See the defence of the 'Trial' in Sherlock's Works, vol. v.
[3] West, in Watson's Tracts, v. 323.
[4] Ib. v. 328.

miraculous incidents followed close upon the back of one another, and consequently were crowded into a small compass of time' (his system of concordance has indeed crowded them very closely by doubling the events), 'so that we ought to be the less surprised at the Apostles not yielding at once to so much evidence. Such a heap of wonders were enough to amaze and overwhelm their understandings. They were, therefore, left for a time to ruminate upon what they had heard; to compare the several reports together; to examine the Scriptures, and recollect the predictions and discourses of their master, to which they were referred, both by the angels and himself. But the examination of the Scriptures was a work of some time, and in the situation in which they were, their minds undoubtedly were in too great an agitation to settle to such an employment with the composure and attention that were necessary. Besides, it must be remembered, they were a company of illiterate men, not versed in the interpretation of prophecies, not accustomed to long arguments and deductions, and were moreover under the dominion of an inveterate prejudice, authorised by the Scribes and Pharisees, the priests and elders, whose learning and whose doctrines they had been instructed early to revere.' Hence, it was only proper that, whilst this board of enquiry was sitting, with ample evidence, indeed, before them, but in an excited frame of mind, ill suited for 'long deductions,' a thoroughly competent witness should appear—no other, indeed, than our Lord himself, who materially aided their investigations. Assuming that this was the spirit in which the new revelation was tested, and that we have the original finding of the court, what reason remains for doubting their word? and what need even of such supplementary arguments as, that the angel seen at the tomb cannot have been a 'phantom of the imagination,' because he was seen by two women at once,[1] and that his speech must have been genuine, because they could not, in their state of terror and confusion, have composed one 'containing so much matter, order and reason,'[2] as that in which he directed the disciples to go to Galilee? Evidently, it is assumed that we have before us an accurate report, taken down at the moment, of the precise words used by the women;

[1] Watson's Tracts, v. 339. [2] Ib. p. 341.

and where such an assumption has been made, it is useless to withdraw our consent to the whole.

62. Lyttelton's similar dissertation upon the conversion of St. Paul is described by Johnson as 'a treatise to which infidelity has never been able to fabricate a specious answer.' He professes to show that Paul's conversion was alone a sufficient demonstration of the divine character of Christianity. The usual arguments as to the absence of motive, the difficulty of securing the necessary accomplices and of carrying on a cheat against the scepticism of the Gentiles, who were not, it seems, like the Jews, a credulous race, but able and disposed to investigate his pretensions with scientific accuracy, are triumphantly alleged to prove that St. Paul was not a deliberate impostor.[1] The more reasonable alternative, that he was an 'enthusiast,' which may be regarded as an indistinct anticipation of the modern view, is equally impossible, because his zeal was tempered by prudence; he was not melancholy, nor ignorant, nor credulous; for his conversion was slow, in spite of the miracles which he saw; nor vain, for did he not humbly declare himself to be the least of the Apostles? Now, 'heat of temper, melancholy, ignorance, credulity, and vanity' are 'the ingredients of which enthusiasm is generally composed.'[2] And, further, however great may be the power of imagination, it could not have made his companions hear the miraculous voice as well as himself, nor could it have induced a viper to bite without hurting him. Equally impossible was it that imagination should have taught him to speak with tongues. Finally, it is out of the question to suppose that Paul was the victim, instead of the originator, of a cheat; and hence we are driven to the only possible conclusion—namely, that he was divinely inspired.

63. Annet, in his various tracts, flatly contradicts all the assumptions made by this amiable pair. In his view, the witnesses contradict each other, they are of doubtful authenticity, their characters do not entitle them to respect, and the stories which they tell are essentially incredible. He argues that all the efforts of the concordance makers fail to remove inconsistencies so gross as to imply deliberate falsehood. His theory of the resurrection appears to be that the disciples

[1] Lyttelton, Misc. Works, ii. 49. [2] Ib. p. 58.

stole the body. He is therefore anxious to make out that the story of the watch set by the high priests is a mere bit of manufactured evidence. He argues at great length that the predictions of his death and resurrection, put into the mouth of Christ by the evangelist, may be reasonably regarded as forgery.[1] It is characteristic that, in meeting such an argument, the apologists constantly assume the minute accuracy of the disputed records, and argue, for example, from the supernatural darkness, the rending of the veil, and various remote inferences as to the probability of the preparations for the embalming the body being known to the high priests.[2] Such root and branch scepticism seems to have produced a bewildering effect upon them, and they assume as incontrovertible the very facts disputed. Thus, for example, Annet points out very reasonably that the supposed multitude of witnesses to the facts is a mere illusion. St. Paul speaks of five hundred witnesses, but the proof of the five hundred witnesses 'depends but upon his single testimony, or of some other in his name, or of the greatest liar in the world, the Church of Rome.'[3] We know little of the origin of the records in which the testimony is contained, but we do know that the Gospels were written after the event, perhaps long after, in a credulous age; and, if written at the time alleged, kept secret among the Christians for a century.[4] The apologists were therefore wrong at every point in assuming that we have the coherent testimony of eye-witnesses.

64. Annet's attack upon the character of the supposed witnesses is even more characteristic. He regards them as most people regarded the Methodists of his time. How do we know, he asks, that 'they lived better at their trade of fishing than preaching?'[5] The early community of goods renders it probable that the Apostles 'made a good living of it.'[5] 'Let his opponents,' he says elsewhere, 'ask Mr. Whitefield if charitable collections and common purse-money are not very good things?'[6] He pictures that notorious hypocrite, toasting himself over a fire lit by the folly of his converts, drinking his wine and laughing at the gulls. St. Paul, of

[1] 'Collection of Tracts,' p. 280.
[2] See specially the tract in answer to Sherlock.
[3] Annet's Tracts, p. 306.
[4] Ib. p. 452.
[5] Ib. p. 308.
[6] Ib. p. 392.

course, fares no better. Annet is not appalled by Lyttelton's dilemma. The great Apostle, he thinks, first hired himself to be an informer against the Christians, and then joined the rising sect when he thought he could make a good thing by it.[1] It is likely that he was in love with the high priest's daughter, and piqued by her disdain into desertion.[2] His affectations of humility are a transparent sham. His visions were easy lies. 'Did not John Reeves and Lodowic Muggleton found their imposture on such pretensions,'[3] and what test can possibly be devised for distinguishing the cases? Nay, St. Paul may be convicted of perjury from his own mouth. When speaking of his journey to Arabia (which it is difficult to fit into the narrative, and which is therefore supposed by Annet to imply a falsehood somewhere), he says, 'Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not.' 'Now,' retorts Annet, 'though he swears that he does not lie, I believe before God that he swears to a lie, and that there is no dependence for truth in these sacred stories.'[4] It is easy to imagine what kind of caricature is drawn of the great Apostle, and what in such hands becomes of his strange outbursts of enthusiasm, his singular outbursts of passion, and his strange feats of logic.

Finally, Annet argues at length that miracles are altogether incredible.[5] All miraculous stories are therefore lies. If, he says, a man tells me that he has crossed Westminster Bridge, the story may be true and deserves examination, though the Bridge is (1747) not quite finished; but if he says that he jumped the river, I know the story to be a lie, and trouble myself no more about it.[6] Apply this simple criterion to the Bible, and it is easy to see what becomes of it.

65. Annet's brutal assaults undoubtedly touched many weak places in the line of defence. The argument had now reached a point at which some solution resting on deeper and wider enquiries was obviously necessary. The deists had been, not confuted, but driven to take a bolder ground. Collins had once said[7] that he 'thought so well of St. Paul, both as a man of sense and a gentleman, that, if he had

[1] Annet's Tracts, p. 54.
[2] Ib. p. 56.
[3] Ib. p. 61.
[4] Ib. p. 68.
[5] 'Supernaturals Examined.'
[6] Annet's Tracts, p. 140.
[7] Barrington's Works, Preface to vol. i. xix note.

asserted he had worked miracles himself, he would have believed him.' On some passage being alleged to prove that St. Paul made such claims, Collins, it is said, was confused and retired. The practical effect, however, of calling St. Paul into the witness-box was to make the deists call him a liar and an impostor. In fact, they were pressed by an awkward dilemma. Is it easier to believe in miracles, or to believe that the early Christians were cheats and dupes? Both sides seemed to agree that nothing but a prospect of gain in this world, or a clear offer of rewards in the next, from undeniable authority, could have induced men to preach a new religion. Which was the most difficult alternative? Pious minds which valued the spiritual influence of religion, and stupid minds which saw no difficulty in miracles, naturally acquiesced in the traditional teaching. Some acute and cynical thinkers abandoned the whole body of orthodox dogma as a cheat. The great question which required decision in order to settle the point at issue was, therefore, the credibility of miracles. We shall presently see how this critical enquiry was conducted in the next generation. Meanwhile, the year 1748 was distinguished by the appearance of two most remarkable contributions to the discussion. One came from Hume, the other from one of the acutest writers of the time, the peculiar character of whose influence demands a somewhat full consideration.

## VI. THE HISTORICAL ARGUMENT.

66. Conyers Middleton, of whom I am speaking, like Pearce, Waterland, and Sherlock, belonged to the group of distinguished Cambridge men who, unfortunately, illustrated the truth that wide learning and elegant scholarship may be combined with controversial brutality. Middleton, as a young man, was a Fellow of Trinity, and his name appears in 1709 on the petition to the Visitor of the College, which was one of the first acts in the long and bitter warfare excited by Bentley's over-vigorous rule.[1] Though Middleton vacated his fellowship by marriage within a year from this time, his antipathies survived. Some years later (in 1717), his resist-

[1] Monk's 'Bentley,' i. 253.

ance to Bentley's demand of four guineas, as a fee due to the Professor from newly-created Doctors of Divinity, provoked a struggle between the University and the indomitable master. Middleton's pamphlet contained the most galling insults to which Bentley was exposed; and, besides the original matter in dispute, Middleton discovered in Bentley's college rule, and in his proposals for a new edition of the Greek Testament, fresh ground for virulent abuse. For a time Middleton had the advantage over his redoubtable opponent, but the great master finally triumphed. Middleton had to apologise for libel; he was fined 50*l.* by the Court of King's Bench for reflecting upon his judges; and in the year 1724, utterly baffled and disgusted, he undertook a journey to Italy for the recovery of his health and spirits. A common antipathy to Bentley had hitherto led him to associate himself with Sherlock, Waterland, and other members of the orthodox party.[1] It seems probable that he considered himself to have been left in the lurch by his companions, though they rewarded his services by securing his appointment as principal keeper of the University library. Whatever may be the cause, there is a vein of bitterness in his later controversial writings. Middleton has the tone of a disappointed man. Probably he felt himself to be in a false position. He is more open to the charge of insidious hostility to Christianity than such writers as Tindal and Collins; for, whilst expressing sentiments almost identical with those of the deists, he retained ecclesiastical preferment to the end of his life. Disappointment at the discovery that he had forfeited his chances of higher preferment by overstepping the conventional limits of orthodoxy, and possibly some of the discontent often felt by men doomed to academical retirement whilst ambitious to be regarded as men of the world, may have contributed to sour him. At any rate, we feel a certain suspicion of his loudly expressed claims to disinterested love of truth, and contempt for the trammels of worldly ambition. His best-known book, 'The Life of Cicero,' is the chief foundation of his claims to a peculiar excellence of style; but his other writings, in spite of the blemishes of sentiment, showed a juster appreciation of the true conditions of the argument

[1] Monk, ii. 151, 154.

than any hitherto noticed, and may be counted as amongst the most powerful agents in the intellectual development of the time. Middleton, who had held his own against Bentley, could not summarily be put down as an ignorant dabbler in matters too deep for him. Though he advanced no general theory, he struck at the weakest point in the orthodox line of defences. He first opened the breach by which critics of wider views and deeper cultivation have forced an entrance. Walpole notices the weakness of the replies made to him as a proof of the decline of the public interest in theological controversy.[1] It is obvious, remarks the cynic, how much personal prejudice influenced his antagonists, inasmuch as the posthumous tracts, which he had kept back as too daring during his life, received no answer after his death. The statement is accurate enough. The spirit of theological controversy was waxing faint, and the whole argument was passing into a new phase. Middleton's writings, though vehemently denounced, raised no excitement comparable to that which had greeted the books of Tindal, Collins, and Woolston. Something, indeed, must be allowed for their purely critical character. The assault is more oblique. Middleton's strongest statements might be accepted without injury to the more rationalising forms of Protestantism. He was, in fact, tracing the first parallels of the siege works ; but they were insignificant in appearance, and the body of the place was not openly threatened.

67. The Letter from Rome, which was the first of Middleton's theological works, was described by him, and was accepted by most of his contemporaries, as a Protestant attack upon Catholicism. Middleton had hoped, as he tells us, to devote himself to classical studies without taking much notice of the modern religion of Rome. To his surprise he found that the two lines of study converged ;[2] the ceremonies of modern Rome were the best help to an imagination which would realise the external appearance of the old paganism ; so striking was the mutual interpretation of the two systems, so vividly were classical allusions illustrated by Catholic ceremonies and modern practices explained by ancient superstitions, that Middleton resolved to devote himself to the

[1] Walpole's 'George II.,' i. 147. [2] Middleton's Misc. Works, v. 91.

historical investigation of this curious phenomenon. The Letter contains the result of his enquiries. The incense smoking upon the numerous altars of the churches recalled Virgil's description of the temple of the Paphian Venus.[1] The use of holy water was long esteemed as heathenish by the early fathers, and when adopted by the Church, the same composition of water and salt, and even the same form of sprinkling-brush, was retained.[2] The lights which burnt before the shrines of the saints were adopted in the same way, after having been in the same way condemned, from the Pagan ritual.[3] Votive offerings hung in churches as they once hung in the temples of the Gods.[4] Crowds of worshippers still bowed before images of wood and stone, though saints, instead of demigods, have served as the originals.[5] The Madonna of the Sun had displaced Vesta, and Cosmos and Damianus have displaced Romulus and Remus;[6] but the spirit of idolatry survives the change of form. Indeed, the modern saints have frequently been manufactured from the ancient gods with scarcely a change of name, and sometimes by a blundering interpretation of an old inscription. There is a modern altar to St. Baccho; and St. Veronica is founded upon a blunder about the Vera Icon.[7] Chapels and rural shrines are still to be found as of old in public ways, in sacred groves, and on the tops of hills.[8] The pagan were merely the rehearsal, in slightly different costumes, of Catholic processions.[9] Pictures come down from heaven like the sacred shield of Numa.[10] Relics and miracles are as plentiful and as absurd as in classical times; and the Pope's succession from the Pontifex Maximus is more plainly made out than from the Apostle Peter.[11]

68. The purpose of the argument, which is ingeniously illustrated and agreeably written, is to base the charge of idolatry upon a surer footing than the elaborate arguments of Protestant divines, which are generally met with equally elaborate evasions. Middleton, in fact, felt, in this instance, the power of the historical method as distinguished from the

[1] Middleton, v. 94.
[2] Ib. p. 97.
[3] Ib. p. 101.
[4] Ib. p. 103.
[5] Ib. p. 111.
[6] Ib p. 117.
[7] Ib. pp. 121, 127.
[8] Ib. p. 130.
[9] Ib. p. 126.
[10] Ib. p. 145.
[11] Ib. p. 158.

dogmatic arguments generally adopted. He was, of course, not original [1] in his general remarks; but he had certainly made excellent use of a weapon destined, in the hands of future enquirers, to yield results reaching infinitely further than the settlement of any sectarian dispute. Probably he was far from appreciating the ultimate bearing of his own remarks. If he was sincere in thinking that his attack upon the enemies of Protestantism must be harmless to Protestantism itself, it was not for want of warning. A Catholic antagonist retorted—with the usual shortsightedness of controversialists — that the tests by which he condemned the Popish miracles would equally condemn all miracles, and that Protestantism could no more deny its debt to ancient paganism than Catholicism. Middleton, of course, replies by denying the consequence. We, he said, retain none of these pagan observances; [2] the miracles in which we believe were wrought for different purposes and differed in their character; yet he takes occasion to deny the validity of Leslie's rules for distinguishing between true and false miracles,[3] and soon afterwards, as we shall directly see, he developed this line of argument on a much larger scale.

69. Middleton was thus far accepted as a respectable ally of Protestantism. The true bearing of his theories was brought out in his next publication. Tindal, in his 'Christianity as Old as the Creation,' had aimed certain sidelong blows at the Old Testament by way of testifying his dislike to a positive religion. The gauntlet thus thrown down was raised by the greatest living champion of orthodoxy. Waterland, leaving to others the task of meeting Tindal's more general argument, undertook to refute his aspersions upon the letter of the Bible. Waterland was regarded with peculiar respect by the clergy as having encountered, and, as was generally supposed,

[1] See Middleton, v. 75, where he quotes Catholic authorities for the similarity alleged. Warton (Essay on Pope, ii. 253) says that great part of the Letters from Rome was taken from a little-known work called 'Conformité des Cérémonies modernes avec les anciennes,' Leyden, 1667. A chapter in Henry More's 'Mystery of Iniquity' partly anticipates the same line of argument. Middleton has also been accused of gross plagiarism in his Life of Cicero. See De Quincey's Essay on Bentley.

[2] Ib. p. 76.

[3] Ib. p. 62.

crushed, the incipient Arianism of Clarke. Not content with the glory of vindicating the Athanasian Creed, he had carried his warfare into the enemy's camp. He objected to any theology based upon the unassisted reason, and tried to show that Clarke's *a priori* demonstration of the existence of God was invalid. We must believe in God, but we must believe in him for the right reason. It was thus his natural tendency to ground the evidence of religion exclusively upon the testimony of facts, and to repudiate any theory which implied the possibility of constructing an independent test of his truth. The historical basis was the sole and sufficient basis, and all that men could do was to receive with due reverence whatever was confirmed by miracles. It is worth while to dwell for a few moments on the answer to Tindal constructed upon these principles; for it would be impossible to find a better example of that brutal theology which gloried in trampling on the best instincts of its opponents, and which is, in the sphere of religion, what a cynical admiration of brute force is in the sphere of politics. A few specimens of his replies to Tindal will exhibit the nature of this most unlovely product of eighteenth-century speculation.

70. A sufficient instance of purely grotesque explanations is the argument that God may have kept the clouds in such a position that there were no rainbows before the Flood.[1] This suggests some curious problems for a Cambridge authority; but, of course, with God nothing is impossible. Waterland is still less felicitous in moral difficulties. Abraham, he says, was quite right in saying that Sarah was his sister, without adding that she was his wife.[2] Nay, his conduct was so 'innocent and laudable,' that Isaac afterwards did the same thing with the same success.[3] He will not altogether justify the deceit practised upon Isaac by Jacob and Rebecca, for he thinks that he can fasten upon Tindal a charge of sanctioning equally loose morality; but he works himself up to the assertion that there were 'good and laudable' circumstances in their action which might 'move a merciful God to give a blessing to it.' Esau was not prejudiced by it, for he had sold his birthright. The Jews borrowed the property of the Egyptians and did not return it; but 'God had an undoubted right to

[1] Waterland's Works, vol. iv. 184. [2] Ib. p. 118. [3] Ib. p. 190.

transfer the property to the Hebrews, since the whole world is his, and no one can put in any bar to his title.'[1]

God, it is plain, may in particular cases sanction downright lying and cheating. God, we are next told, was so mild in ancient days, that he would have spared Sodom had it contained ten righteous men.[2] This merciful Being, however, ordered a wholesale slaughter of the Canaanites, men, women and children ; and Tindal's comparison of the Jewish executors of his vengeance to the Spaniards in Mexico is 'dull and insipid,' for is it not notorious that God takes away thousands of innocent children every day?[3] Rahab's betrayal of her countrymen was laudable, for she was deeply sensible that the Lord of heaven and earth had presented the land to the Jews.[4] The resemblance of the crime of Ehud to the murder of the French Henries was only superficial, for the Popish assassins had not a divine commission.[5] Jael had a divine direction to drive the nail through Sisera's head,[6] and Jephtha was right to kill his daughter, even though he might have redeemed her according to the Levitical law.[7] His sense of honour was too delicate for such a subterfuge. 'Being a very religious man, he was scrupulous in the matter. Having made a vow so solemn, and upon so public an occasion, he might think it mean in a person of his distinction to redeem so precious a treasure as his only daughter at the low legal price of thirty shekels.' Since God has an 'absolute right over the lives of all,' he was perfectly justified in punishing Saul's ill-behaviour to the Gibeonites by inflicting three years' famine upon the Israelites.[8] Since Elijah could only bring from heaven such fire as God chose to send, he could not have done wrong in slaying the captains who came against him. There is nothing 'at all surprising' in the story of the she-bears killing forty-two children, for 'it was kind of God to take them out of the world before they should come to do that malevolently and of their own accord, which they now began to do as set on and managed by others.'[9]

71. All this, and more, is said, not by Voltaire in one of his most scoffing moods, but by the most renowned living de-

[1] Waterland's Works, iv. 220.
[2] Ib. p. 223.
[3] Ib. p. 233.
[4] Ib. p. 243.
[5] Ib. p. 250.
[6] Ib. p. 256.
[7] Ib. p. 258.
[8] Ib. p. 270.
[9] Ib. p. 277.

fender of the faith. Voltaire indeed had only to repeat it literally with a covert sneer, in order to convert it into a bitter lampoon. Waterland, for example, justifies the slaughter of the Amalekites and Agag on the ground that the Jews had God's express orders for it. 'What can we desire more,' he asks, 'than an order from heaven?'[1] And here is Voltaire's version, in the drama of 'Saul.' Samuel reproaches Saul for pardoning Agag.

'Comment,' exclaims Agag, 'la plus belle vertue serait regardée chez vous comme un crime?'

Samuel (à Agag). 'Tais-toi; ne blasphème point.' (à Saul) 'Saul, çi-devant roi des Juifs, Dieu ne vous avait-il pas ordonné, par ma bouche, d'égorger tous les Amalécites sans épargner ni les femmes, ni les filles, ni les enfans à la mamelle?'

Agag. 'Ton Dieu t'avait ordonné cela! tu t'es trompé; tu voulais dire ton diable.'

Agag's retort was excellent; but, according to Voltaire, it made very little impression upon Samuel, and Waterland was apparently quite as indifferent as the prophet. Though he could not hew Tindal in pieces before the Lord, he thought that men might be hectored into orthodoxy by threats of hell fire; and we need not enquire whether the sarcasm of the assailants of Christianity, or the brow-beating vulgarities of its official defenders, did most injury to the cause.

72. The philosophy of this mode of defence is given by Waterland himself. 'All the pretended arguments,' he says, 'against plain scriptural facts, or plain scriptural declarations, are empty fallacies, good for nothing. The sitting down to consider what God *ought* to do, without first enquiring what he *has* done, is preposterous and absurd.[2] . . . it is beginning at the wrong end, regulating the divine wisdom by ours, instead of regulating ours by his.' Therefore wholesale massacres and deliberate lying may be accepted as virtuous actions, if only the narrator allege that the perpetrator had divine authority for his actions. The stupidity of using such arguments against a man who denies altogether the divine authority of these detestable crimes, and indeed regards them as the wild fancies of a barbarous race, passes

[1] Waterland's Works, p. 263. [2] Ib. p. 215.

out of sight in the disgust excited by such a theology as is here implied. The truth of a religion is explicitly and avowedly staked—not on the purity and elevation of its teaching—but on the bare historical evidence of certain events which happened thousands of years ago. It is only in accordance with such teaching that Waterland ridicules any motives to virtue except fear of punishment. The hopes of heaven and the dread of hell would, he thinks, do youth 'ten times more service than all his (Tindal's) visionary and fantastic helps to virtue.'[1] And his view of the relation of God to man is sufficiently illustrated by his argument in defence of the narrow area of revelation, that Nebuchadnezzar's proclamation—which he regards as equally authentic with the proclamation of George II. against profligacy—and those of his successors would be sufficient notice to most of the heathen nations, unless they were culpably careless, stupid, or prejudiced. If they did not attend to such warnings, God might rightfully torture them in hell to all eternity.

73. Middleton entered the controversy by a bitter and powerful pamphlet directed against Waterland. It provoked an angry war of words, in which Pearce defended Waterland, and accused Middleton of infidelity. Three further letters contain Middleton's replies, which, as is usual, degenerate into matters of less interest, and long discussions as to the accuracy of quotations and translations. The pith of the assault is given in the first pamphlet.

Middleton, though eager to inflict every possible wound upon his antagonist, says little of the strange immorality of his apology. The point which he is specially anxious to enforce is the utter impossibility of maintaining the dogma of literal inspiration. He dwells, for example, on the extreme absurdity of Waterland's account of the Fall. Waterland makes the serpent to be the Devil, though Moses—the supposed author of the Book of Genesis—says nothing about the Devil, and only speaks of the natural subtlety of the serpent; so that Waterland is already forced to rationalise.[2] Eve's knowledge of the serpent's cunning is given on one page as the reason why she should not be surprised at his talking; on the next, it is suggested that, for want of experience, she could not know whether

[1] Waterland's Works, p. 267.

[2] Middleton's Works, iii. 15 *et seq.*

beasts talked or not. Middleton agrees with Waterland that it is extravagant to suppose that serpents were once so like angels that one could be easily mistaken for the other; yet, he says, this extravagant notion was adopted by Patrick and other learned men, because Waterland's theory seemed still more extravagant. Then the introduction of the Devil only raises the further difficulty how God's justice can be vindicated for not interposing in so unequal a combat. Is it like a good father to disinherit a child who had been misled by the craft of some superior sophist? After some more ridicule of Waterland's theory, which reads very much like ridicule of the author of Genesis, Middleton gives some appropriate quotations from Cicero, in one of which he ridicules a story of a serpent talking to Alexander in a dream. Middleton pronounces in favour of a purely allegorical interpretation, Adam representing reason, Eve the flesh, and the serpent lust or pleasure. It may well be doubted whether he was more in earnest than Collins or Woolston. A more characteristic argument follows, in which Middleton agrees with Tindal in tracing many of the Jewish practices, and especially circumcision, to the Egyptians.[1] After ridiculing the story of Babel, taken in its literal meaning, Middleton proceeds to give his own method of dealing with Tindal, which, it must be confessed, was little calculated to allay suspicions of his orthodoxy. His main assertion is that, even if Christianity were admitted to be an imposture, it would be 'criminal and immoral' to attempt its overthrow,[2] 'as 'tis now established by law, derived from our ancestors, confirmed by the belief and practice of so many ages.' Some 'traditional religion or other'[3] is a necessity, and it is therefore a hopeless attempt to supplant Christianity by reason. To defend every proposition in revelation is as absurd as to maintain that every one of God's visible works serves an obvious purpose; and by voluntarily assuming the burden of supporting every text, the apologist will 'expose religion to too great hazard, and engage on too great odds' with his antagonist.[4] A clergyman could

[1] This view was apparently taken by Tindal from Spenser, whose treatise, 'De Legibus Hebræorum,' appeared in 1685, and gave some offence in his advocacy of the same view. Shaftesbury had dwelt upon the same point more recently.

[2] Middleton's Works, iii. 52. [3] Ib. p. 56. [4] Ib. p. 66.

hardly be expected to say in plainer terms that his creed was logically untenable, though politically useful.

74. In the subsequent tracts, Middleton betrays a disposition to attack the authority of the Scriptures tempered by a certain fear of the consequences. The controversy turned in part upon the correct interpretation of a passage in which Josephus, comparing Moses to Minos, and other lawgivers of Greek legend, seems to admit the existence of a certain amount of statecraft in the Jewish prophet. Middleton guardedly infers that we should use 'reserve and moderation' in speaking of the 'marvellous and supernatural part of Moses's character.'[1] He is anxious, however, to soften the effect of his language, and though attacking the literal interpretations of the Fall and the Tower of Babylon, declares that he only rejects the narrative 'hypothetically or conditionally.'[2] He says that it is not 'material to enquire'[3] how much there may be of an historical element in such stories; and he finally formulates his opinion in four propositions.[4] He maintains, first, that the Jews derived some of their customs from Egypt; secondly, that the Egyptians possessed arts and learning in the time of Moses; thirdly, that the primitive vindicators of Scripture were compelled to have recourse to allegory; and, fourthly, that the Scriptures are not of absolute and universal inspiration.

75. No one would care to deny any of these propositions at the present day; but, harmless as they appear, they had a very marked significance. The method was of more importance than the result. Middleton had, in fact, a more distinct view than any of his contemporaries of the essential continuity of history. The dogma of literal inspiration stood in his way, by giving to the Bible a character entirely disparate from that of all other historical records. The narrative itself, and the events of which it spoke, were removed by a superstitious veil of sanctity from the domain of historical criticism. To remove that veil, and to apply the same methods of enquiry to all periods and all nations, and to show how the supposed breaches of continuity disappeared under closer investigation, was the aim of all Middleton's writings. One

[1] Middleton's Works, p. 107.
[2] Ib. p. 220.
[3] Ib. p. 233.
[4] Ib. p. 277.

of his posthumous tracts, called 'Reflections on the Variations to be found in the Four Evangelists,' expresses very clearly the bearing of these principles upon the dogma of literal inspiration. Considered as historical documents, he says, they are confirmed by their trifling discrepancies. But this argument, familiar enough to apologists, becomes, as he says, 'wholly trifling and impotent' on the theory which represents the Evangelists as mere 'organs and pipes' for conveying the utterances of the Divine Spirit to men.[1] The only legitimate method is to cast aside this needless hypothesis, which reduces us to 'miserable shifts and evasions,' and to look facts in the face. 'The case is the same in theological as in natural enquiries; it is experience alone, and the observation of facts, which can illustrate the truth of principles. Facts are stubborn things, deriving their existence from nature, and though frequently misrepresented and disguised by art and false colours, yet cannot possibly be totally changed or made pliable to the systems which happen to be in fashion, but sooner or later will always reduce the opinions of men to compliance and conformity with themselves.'[2] Middleton evidently anticipates the fundamental principles of historical criticism.

76. His various tracts are directed chiefly against the belief in verbal inspiration; that belief, however, was obnoxious chiefly as standing in the way of a more important doctrine, which finds expression in his 'Free Inquiry into the Miraculous Powers which are supposed to have existed in the Christian Church through several successive Ages.' This book appeared in 1748, and is said by Hume to have 'eclipsed' his 'Essay on Miracles,' which, by a noteworthy coincidence, appeared in the same year. It had been preceded, in 1747, by an 'Introductory Discourse,' which, as usual, led to some further controversy. A certain Dr. Chapman conceived himself to have discovered a Jesuit plot, the first result of which was Hardouin's attempt to prove that the writings attributed to the ancient classical authors were modern forgeries; and the last, Middleton's assault on the fathers; the general purpose being to throw discredit on all human testimony. Middleton's argument, if not inspired by

[1] Middleton's Works, ii. 341. [2] Ib. 375.

the Jesuits, might well be regarded as insidious by a sound divine, for it was obviously capable of a far wider application than that which he avowedly gave to it. It touched the central problem.

77. The question had frequently been asked; where was the line to be drawn between the exceptional world ruled by supernatural agencies and the existing world, in which the laws of nature worked without interruption? So profound a distinction might, one would have fancied, be marked by a corresponding breach in the continuity of history. Miracles, as the writers of that day expressed themselves, had plainly ceased; but when and where did they cease? Did the extraordinary powers confided by Christ to his Church expire with the Apostles? Did they continue over the palmy days of the first three centuries? Did they last through the fourth, or even into the fifth, age? All those opinions had been held by Anglican divines of reputation, whilst the ingenious Whiston had hit upon the alternative doctrine that the supernatural powers were withdrawn from the Church A.D. 381, on account of the Athanasian heresy; but that from that time the Devil had supplied an efficient substitute.[1] Middleton, assuming that the purity of doctrine was guaranteed by the continuance of miracles, inferred that miracles could not be admitted without danger to Protestantism even in the third century, inasmuch as many superstitious observances, such as the worship of images and relics, prayers for the dead, and the superstitious use of crosses, had already crept in. This part of his argument, it may be noticed in passing, contributed to the temporary conversion of Gibbon, who thought the proof of the existence of these beliefs more satisfactory than the proof of the discontinuance of miracles. Middleton, however, had good reason to urge for his incredulity. The earliest fathers, he said, did not claim miraculous power. The later fathers who put forward that claim were fools or liars, but especially liars. Justin Martyr, for example, who is the earliest of those whose character is impugned, tells a quantity of silly stories, quotes acknowledged forgeries, such as the Sibylline books, with profound reverence, and blunders between Simon Magus and the Sabine deity, Semosanctus. Irenæus

[1] Middleton's Works, i. xliii.

relies upon the authority of Papias, who, as Eusebius says, 'was a weak man of very shallow understanding,' and imposed a quantity of silly traditions upon the early ecclesiastical writers. The strange conceits which they took for arguments are a sufficient proof of the imbecility of these authorities. Later fathers, of greater reputation, sanctioned pious frauds. Jerome deliberately confesses the practice; after relating a silly story about certain relics at Jerusalem, he adds that he does 'not find fault with an error which flows from an hatred of the Jews, and a pious zeal for the Christian faith.'[1] The learned Mosheim does not scruple to intimate his fears that 'those who search with any attention into the writings of the greatest and most holy doctors of the fourth century will find them all, without exception, disposed to deceive and to lie whenever the interest of religion requires it.'[2]

78. Whatever the justice of these accusations, which Middleton supports by many illustrations, it must be admitted that he shows the harshness of judgment characteristic of his time. Charges of deliberate fraud and imposture are always on his lips. Such a story, for example, as that of St. Anthony, who told Athanasius how he had seen the Devil in person knocking at the door of his cell, in order to propose a truce, is unhesitatingly set down to fiction, instead of, what would be more familiar to the present generation, the diseased imagination of the ascetic monk. To the suggestion, not a very happy one, it must be admitted, in the mouth of an apologist, that the fathers may have been deceived as well as deceivers, Middleton replies that they could not have been so stupid. It is odd, he says, that the state of the controversy is suddenly reversed. 'Dr. Middleton conceives so good an opinion of their (the fathers') understanding, as to think it impossible that they should not discover the palpable forgery of the absurd stories which they relate; whereas the Observator takes them to have been so grossly ignorant and credulous that they might probably believe them.'[3] Though Middleton errs, with all his contemporaries, in attributing to the fathers the same degree of critical faculty which was developed in later times, we cannot doubt the value of his main contention, that the same tests should be applied by us to the narratives

[1] Middleton's Works, i. 288. [2] Ib. p. 291. [3] Ib. ii. 39.

of those days which should be applied now. The belief in the miraculous had so far died out that it was enough to relate the stories simply, and to leave them to be confuted by their intrinsic absurdity. The tacit presumption which still favoured the Gospels had already disappeared in regard to the less familiar narratives of a later time. St. Augustine, for example, gives a curious account of certain miracles which occurred in his own day, and complains of the singular indifference which prevailed among the Christians themselves. To put an end to this negligence, he took care that narratives should be drawn up by the parties concerned in any miracle, and publicly read to the people. Yet they still made no impression. To explain this, says Middleton, it is only necessary to attend to the miracles themselves.[1] One story, for example, relates how some holy earth, brought from Christ's grave, instantly cured a paralytic patient. After repeating two of these stories 'so precisely described and authentically tested by one of the most venerable fathers in all antiquity,' Middleton assumes that they confute themselves, and that the indifference of the people shows simply that they 'saw, or suspected the cheat, and were tired with the repeated frauds of this kind which their bishops were imposing upon them.'[2] No evidence, he in fact assumes, can be sufficient to establish our belief in such nonsense. He exposes the fallacy of Dr. Chapman, who had argued that we have as much evidence for a belief in the miracles of St. Simeon Stylites as for a belief in his existence, by pointing out, in the spirit of Hume, that miraculous stories require a very different weight of evidence from ordinary facts. The cures, for example, attributed to Vespasian would be accepted by nobody, and in the same way, we take the word of ecclesiastical historians so long as reason and religion permit, and ascribe the rest to their 'credulity, prejudices, and erroneous principles.'[3] One miracle, it may be worth notice, is easily explained by a scientific observation. The miracle of the tongueless confessors is mentioned by Gibbon as resting on remarkably good evidence.[4] He had apparently forgotten, however, that

[1] Middleton's Works, i. 267. [2] Ib. p. 275. [3] Ib. p. 301.

[4] 'Decline and Fall,' ch. xxxvii. Disraeli ('Curiosities of Literature,' p. 426) mentions a book published in Paris in 1765, the title of which begins with the

Middleton shows, what has since been illustrated by fresh cases, that people in modern times have been known to speak without tongues.[1]

79. Middleton is on stronger ground when he assigns the general intellectual condition of the age as the true source of miracles. He shows, for example, that the belief in diabolical possession and the efficacy of exorcism was not confined to the Christians,[2] but was equally prevalent amongst Jews and Gentiles. The name of Christ worked no greater wonders than the name of Solomon, and the fathers admit the reality of the pagan miracles, only attributing their power to diabolic influence. If they were deluded by such impostors, why not by men of their own persuasion? If not deluded, might they not find it convenient to oppose one cheat to another, and beat their antagonists at their own weapons?[3] The fact that the power of exorcism was finally put under restriction, and allowed only to those who had been appointed by bishops, is a sufficient proof of the scandal which had been brought upon the Church by impostors and enthusiasts.[4] And, finally, we observe the same phenomena in our own day. No miracle is 'so authentically attested as the existence of witches.'[5] Yet the utter 'incredibility of the theory prevailed, and was found at length too strong for all this force of human testimony; so that the belief of witches is now utterly extinct.'[6] Nay, there is hardly a single fact alleged to have occurred in primitive times which might not be paralleled in some modern sect of Christians. We now attribute such events to the craft of a few operating on the many. Why not apply the same rule to the earlier records? Middleton, it may be remarked in conclusion, combats the application of his principles to the case of the Gospel narratives. His defence, however, seems to be weak, and he ends by declaring that the argument remains the same whatever the consequences; if the fathers are convicted of craft and credulity, we must not believe

words 'The Christian Religion proved by a single Fact; a Dissertation in which it is shown that the three Catholics of whom Hunneric, King of the Vandals, cut the tongues, spake miraculously for the remainder of their days.' See, too, Mr. Twisleton's curious monograph upon that subject, called 'The Tongue not essential to Speech.'

[1] Middleton's Works, i. p. 315.
[2] Ib. p. 209.
[3] Ib. p. 213.
[4] Ib. p. 221.
[5] Ib. p. 355.
[6] Ib. p. 357.

them, whatever may be the conclusions to which our disbelief may lead.[1]

80. No part, it may be, of Middleton's attack was strictly original. The fathers had already been assailed by Protestants, especially Daillé, in the preceding century, and more recently by Barbeyrac in the interests of freethinking. But Middleton brought together a significant series of arguments, which tended to place the whole subject in a new light. The atmosphere of opinion was already hostile to miracles. 'Our ingenious friend . . . .,' he writes to Warburton in 1736, 'has, as you observe, rightly charged the source of infidelity on the miraculous history of each Testament; yet our divines are continually haranguing upon it, as reflecting nothing but lustre and brightness on the evidences of both;' and this remark is appended to the observation that the 'lives and characters of the fathers are more likely, in my opinion, to shake a settled, than confirm a wavering faith.'[2] Middleton certainly used them for that purpose. Opinion had so far developed itself, that he could, as we have seen, quote a miraculous story as a sufficient refutation of itself. Within the sacred precincts of Bible history, this, indeed, could not be done; but the limit between the regions where the Almighty was allowed, and that where he was forbidden to work miracles, was fluctuating and uncertain. By trying to throw it further back, Middleton was extending the area of free criticism, and the extension might obviously be indefinite. All that was required was to induce men to look upon the history of Moses as they looked upon the history of Marlborough; and his mode of approaching the problem was effective because it threw upon his opponents the burden of drawing a distinction between the two cases. Why, he asked, by insinuation, should you believe Moses or Matthew if you won't believe St. Augustine? Why, if you believe St. Augustine, do you disbelieve modern stories of miracle and witchcraft? How and upon what principles is the line to be drawn? The effect of the argument as a whole may be inferred from the task thus imposed upon his antagonists. To answer Collins or Woolston plausibly, it was enough to give the solutions provided by the ingenuity of generations of commentators for each difficulty. To answer

[1] Middleton's Works, i. 324. [2] Ib. i. 385.

Middleton plausibly, it would have been necessary to enter into the general principles of historical criticism, and to find the solution of many of the problems round which controversy is labouring, or affects to be labouring, at the present day. Middleton closes the deist controversy, for he explicitly challenges the assumption which characterises, as we have seen, the whole school of apologists and their assailants—namely, the breach of continuity between sacred and profane history—and he challenges it in such a way that evasion is impossible. The answers attempted to this most insidious of all assailants of Christianity were too feeble to justify any notice.

His writings and Hume's essay form the starting-point for the discussions which occupied the next half-century. Here, however, at the middle of the century, it is as well to pause for a moment, in order to consider what have been the real points at issue and what conclusions had been reached.

81. Middleton's covert assault upon the orthodox dogmas was incomparably the most effective of the whole deist controversy. It indicates the approach of a genuine historical method. Middleton was the first to see, though he saw dimly, that besides the old hypotheses of supernatural interference and human imposture, a third and more reasonable alternative may be suggested. The conception is beginning to appear, though still obscured by many crude assumptions of a really scientific investigation of the history of religious developments. Middleton is thus the true precursor of Gibbon, whose immediate relation to him has already been noticed; and yet, after Middleton comes a sudden pause in the controversy—a pause which is generally described by saying that the deists had been silenced by force of argument. It is just as true that the orthodox had been silenced. Middleton, as I have said, received no serious answer; and thus the sceptics had the last word in the controversy, and that the most effective word which had been spoken. To explain the facts, we must look at the whole phenomenon from a point of view above mere partisan interests. I have remarked upon the substantially sceptical tendency of the whole controversy upon the so-called internal evidences—a

tendency which, as we shall presently see, is most strongly marked in Butler, incomparably the greatest of the Christian advocates. The deists had triumphed so far as they had insisted upon the impossibility of reconciling the historical conception of the Christian Deity with the conceptions of metaphysical optimism. The Christians, on the other hand, had shown as triumphantly that the attempt to transfer to the pale abstraction called Nature the emotions excited by the historical religion was futile in itself, and condemned by the broad facts of experience. The result was the decline of the pale shadow of Christianity which called itself Deism, and which had never excited an enthusiastic or disinterested support; and, on the other hand, the practical admission that Christianity must seek for support elsewhere than in abstract philosophy. Meanwhile, the argument upon the external evidences had been gradually developed. Leslie's writings represent the initial stage. The sacred narrative appeared to rest upon a body of evidence so compact, flawless, and coherent, that it could only be rejected by the most reckless scepticism. The deists begin by saying that the Bible itself is open to criticism. True, reply the orthodox, but sound criticism shows the flaws to be superficial. The deists retort that criticism destroys one main element of strength—namely, the mutual corroboration of the Old and New Testaments. The orthodox, discovering the danger of defending the position in detail, reply that the great fact of a general correspondence still remains. The deists proceed to ridicule the most improbable facts of the sacred narrative. The reply is to fall back upon the central fact of the resurrection, and to say that the evidence for this miracle, at least, is conclusive; if its truth be once granted, the whole narrative may be accepted. This position, however, not only implies a long retreat from the original assumption of the unassailable accuracy of the whole narrative, but provokes a more dangerous retort. Hume replies that no evidence can prove a miracle, and Middleton that stories of miracles only prove the credulity of the narrator. One writer appeals to logic, and the other to historical evidence; and no real answer is attempted to either. And yet, at this critical point, the controversy drops.

82. The full explanation of this curious fact probably de-

pends upon a wide combination of conditions, to some of which I shall refer hereafter. So far as is due to the logical development of speculation, its true meaning seems to be tolerably clear. The intellectual change, of which the deist controversy was rather a symptom than a cause, implies the growing difficulty of maintaining the old separation between the sphere of sacred and profane history. The mere habit of critically discussing the ancient records, however inadequate the critical methods, and however orthodox the intention of the ablest writers, necessarily implied a growing tendency to measure their value by the ordinary critical tests, the simple reason being that no others are available. The process naturally culminated in the denial of the miraculous element, which, in other words, is the denial of any distinction between the two spheres. But, on the other hand, a purely critical process of this kind, especially when conducted with totally insufficient means, is necessarily unproductive. If Middleton had caught a faint glimpse, Middleton alone had caught any glimpse of sounder principles. Such assailants as Woolston or Annet might lower the general reverence for the Gospel narratives, but did not even remotely hint at any more worthy solution than the old hypothesis of imposture. So far from any philosophy being ready to profit by the victory over the old beliefs, the only so-called philosophy was rapidly expiring. The deists might show conclusively that many parts of the biblical narrative were unworthy of the God of nature, as they conceived him, but their conceptions were so faint, and so rapidly decaying, that the discord was of little importance. The scepticism implied in the orthodox argument was rather confirmed than weakened by such discoveries. Men of keen and cultivated intellects were, indeed, led by the whole argument into scepticism, but it was a scepticism of the indolent variety. They agreed substantially with Middleton's view, which was shared by men like Gibbon and Horace Walpole. The traditional religion was absurd; but men must have a traditional religion. There was no better explanation of the universe to be offered; and so long as the hands of priests could be tied, or enthusiasm kept in order, it was better to allow the old ideas to go through the slow process of natural decay. In more commonplace minds

the same sentiment took a different form. They thought that they could strike out a judicious mean by believing everything, but believing nothing too vigorously. They could make a kind of common-sense religion out of the old prejudices, and satisfy their not very craving appetite for truth by a vague admission that the Bible was not flawless, though true enough for practical purposes. In short, the main result of the attack and defence was to lower the general tone of religious feeling, without destroying the respect for established creeds; to make men unwilling to ask awkward questions, and condone with their consciences by not making arrogant assumptions; and generally to bring about a comfortable compromise, which held together till Wesley from one side, and Tom Paine from another, forced more serious thoughts upon the age. The only positive result, which will be noticed in a succeeding chapter, was a tendency to substitute a still crude method of historical enquiry for the old discussions of first principles.

83. Before approaching this subject, however, I shall consider more fully three typical representatives of thought. In Butler's writings, the orthodox position is given in the fullest and most philosophical shape, though in a shape marked by the peculiar idiosyncrasy of the author. Hume represents the fullest development of the scepticism latent in many inferior minds, and, alone amongst all writers of the century, confronts the ultimate questions which underlie all philosophy and theology. Warburton, incomparably inferior in real intellectual power to either of these great men, represents the strange medley of inconsistent theories evolved by the shifting currents of contemporary thought. Butler attempts to meet the deist position by saying that nature reveals to us the same God as Christianity. Hume denies that nature does or can reveal to us any God. Warburton says that the different revelations are in fact irreconcilable, but that it is because God has changed his policy on several occasions. Each answer is characteristic in its way, and deserves a fuller examination.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER IV.

THERE is a curious little bit of literary history in regard to Collins's controversy with Bentley, of which I must venture to give some account. Poor Collins's character has suffered at the hands of orthodox theologians, and I should be glad to clear him—though at so late a period !—from unjust censure, and to save future readers a little trouble.

A story noticed by various writers is thus given in Monk's 'Life of Bentley':[1]—'Instead of defending himself against Bentley's "Remarks," which called in question his character, both for scholarship and good faith, he (Collins) endeavoured to elude them by pitiful stratagems. He reprinted his book at the Hague with a London title and with such a resemblance in the form and number of its pages as gave it the appearance of an original edition, but with a few omissions and alterations in certain passages which Bentley had exposed as disgraceful to his character; in order that future readers might believe him innocent of these charges.' In a note to this passage Bishop Monk says:—'It absolutely had this effect with Mr. Pritchard, a gentleman of Ledbury, in Herefordshire, a disciple of the Freethinkers' sect.' After quoting Bentley's exposure of Collins's blundering translation of *idiotis evangelistis* by 'idiot evangelists,' the bishop proceeds, 'In the reprint mentioned in the text, Collins omitted the words by *idiot evangelists*, and Mr. Pritchard, who possessed that copy and believed it to be the original, persuaded himself that this disgraceful translation was nothing but an impudent forgery of Bentley, invented to discredit his antagonist. There may be found in Nichol's "Literary Anecdotes" (vol. ii. 673) an amusing correspondence on the subject between this gentleman and Professor Lort.' Monk adds that Collins published another edition, with more alterations, and superintended a French translation of the 'Discourse,' with further attempts to evade Bentley's strictures. These artifices, he adds, are detailed in a French book published at Amsterdam many years afterwards, termed 'Friponnerie laïque.' This book, I regret to say, I have not seen.

The accusation reappears with characteristic exaggeration in De Quincey's review of Monk.[2] 'Collins,' he says, 'wanted something more than piety; he was not even an honest man; for he reprinted his work in Holland, purified from the gross cases of ignorance exposed by Bentley; and then circulating this improved edition among his friends in England, which he had taken care to mask by a lying title-page, he persuaded them that the passages in question were mere forgeries of Bentley's.'

Here we see that the mistake to which Collins's alterations led Mr. Pritchard is represented, without a shadow of evidence, as being the result of Collins's direct persuasion. Surely Collins must have been wanting not merely in honesty and piety, but in the most ordinary common sense,

[1] Vol. i. 352–3. Second edition. [2] De Quincey's Works, vol. vi. 115.

when he endeavoured to circulate a delusion so easily exposed. All literary England was ringing with Bentley's answer. Could the most impudent of men expect to convince people with the books in their hands that Bentley's quotation was an 'impudent forgery?'.

The facts, however, will speak for themselves. The whole force of the accusation rests upon the hypothesis that Collins meant his manipulated edition to be passed off as a first edition. There is surely no want of candour in correcting a blunder which has been exposed, and Monk might have noticed a simple explanation suggested in the passage quoted from Nichol's 'Literary Anecdotes,' namely, that on discovering his error Collins had cancelled one sheet of his book.

I have seen four editions of Collins's 'Discourse,' all of which have London 1713 on the title-page; though the last appears from its type to have been printed in Holland, and is, I presume, the reprint noticed by Monk. None of these editions, moreover, have any notice of a preceding edition on the title-page, and, so far, there seems to be some plausibility in the accusation.

The first edition of 178 pages (at p. 90) has the words 'idiot evangelists,' as quoted by Bentley. The second edition closely resembles the first. It has the same number of pages, and for the most part is an exact reproduction. Certain errors, however, noticed in a list of *errata* in the first edition are corrected in the next; and for idiot evangelists we have the Latin words *idiotis evangelistis* without translation. Two or three additions are made, but all the other passages attacked by Bentley remain unaltered. The third edition differs in type and has 140 pages; at page 73 we have *idiotis evangelistis*. In this and other respects it seems to be taken from the previous edition. Possibly it is a piratical reprint. If Collins attempted to pass off either of these editions as the first, he incurred the trouble, expense, and risk of detection in order to evade this one charge of mistranslating '*idiotis*.' There are, however, other errors equally manifest, and these, or several of them, are corrected in the fourth, or Dutch, edition. Here, too, we have 'ignorant evangelists' instead of the other phrase; and other changes are clearly intended to meet Bentley's criticisms. Could Collins, then, have intended to pass off this for the first edition? One little circumstance should have been noticed by his assailants which shows conclusively that he could not. To 'ignorant evangelists' (p. 74) is appended a reference to 'Phileleutherus Lipsiensis' (*i.e.* Bentley's) 'Remarks on the Discourse of Freethinking.' Another reference to Bentley's book is given at page 68, and a long note about the 30,000 corrections contains a reference to Hare's letter of thanks to Bentley for exposing Collins. Surely a man who corrects a blunder and refers to the critic who pointed it out deserves, if anything, to be praised for his candour. It is at least plain that Collins could not have meant to pass off as original an edition which notices the answer to his previous edition. A collation of this edition is given in Dyce's edition of Bentley's miscellaneous works.

I shall venture, in conclusion, to give an example, I hope unique, of the candid treatment which Collins received from an orthodox writer.

'The late Mr. Cumberland,' says Disraeli, in the 'Curiosities of Literature,'[1] 'in the romance entitled "His Life" gave this extraordinary fact, that Bentley, who so ably replied by his "Remarks," &c., to Collins's "Discourse of Freethinking," when many years afterwards he discovered him fallen into great distress, conceiving that, by having ruined Collins's character as a writer for ever he had been the occasion of his personal misery, he liberally contributed to his maintenance. In vain I mentioned to that elegant writer, who was not curious about facts, that this person could never have been *Anthony* Collins, who had always a plentiful fortune; and when it was suggested to him that this A. Collins, as he printed it, must have been *Arthur* Collins, the historical compiler, who was often in pecuniary difficulties, still he persisted in sending the lie down to posterity, *totidem verbis*, without alteration in his second edition, observing to a friend of mine that "the story, while it told well, might serve as a striking instance of his great relative's generosity; and that *it should stand*, because it could do no harm to any but to *Anthony* Collins, whom he considered little short of an atheist."'

Disraeli gives some curious letters as to the fate of certain MSS. left by Collins at his death to Des Maizeaux. Collins's widow got them from Des Maizeaux for fifty guineas. Des Maizeaux afterwards repented of this transaction and returned the money. The MSS., however, disappeared, like the second volume of Tindal's work.

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## CHAPTER V.

### BUTLER'S 'ANALOGY.'

1. JOSEPH BUTLER belonged to the exceedingly small class of men who find in abstract speculation not merely the main employment, but almost the sole enjoyment, of their lives. He stands out in strange contrast to the pushing patronage-hunters of his generation. Amongst the clergy, Berkeley alone was his equal, as, in some respects, Berkeley was greatly his superior in speculative power. But Berkeley was impelled by his ardent benevolence into active occupations, whilst Butler passed his days, like a certain philosopher mentioned by Voltaire, in profound meditation. In David Hume the purely intellectual temperament was still more strikingly manifested. Hume's philosophical curiosity or love of truth —whatever we please to call it—was freer from any alloy of ulterior motive. But if Hume gained as a philosopher, he lost as a practical teacher of mankind, by his want of that deep moral earnestness which is Butler's great claim upon our respect. Butler stood apart from the world. Good preferments, indeed, were showered upon the solitary thinker, without solicitation of his own. He had the fortune to be introduced to Queen Caroline, the only member of the Hanoverian family in that age who loved or even tolerated intellectual excellence. Her favour presented him, when already in possession—thanks to an earlier patron—of 'one of the richest parsonages in England,' to the rather incongruous dignity of a bishopric. The poverty of the see of Bristol was eked out by the revenues of the deanery of St. Paul's; and, shortly before his death, he was translated to Durham. He used his wealth liberally, as one to whom earthly possessions were of little importance, and seems to have discharged his episcopal duties conscientiously, and even admirably, if judged by

the lax standard of the time. In those days bishops had leisure. The most characteristic anecdote related of him comes from Dean Tucker, whom he distinguished by his friendship at Bristol. The bishop was accustomed to walk in his garden through many hours of the night; and, on one occasion, he suddenly turned to his companion Tucker, and put the well-known question, whether nations might not go mad as well as individuals? Butler did not escape the ordinary penalties of singularity. His contemporaries, puzzled by his ascetic and meditative life, thought there must be something wrong about an episcopal recluse who, to say the truth, would have been more in his element in a monastic cell, or in the chair of a German university, than in the seat of an eighteenth-century bishop. When he put up a cross in his chapel, and was convicted of reading the Lives of the Saints, the problem seemed to be solved, and he was set down as a papist.

2. Butler was born in 1692, and died June 16, 1752. The two books upon which his fame rests, the 'Sermons' and the 'Analogy,' were published in 1726 and 1736 respectively. They are remarkable amongst other things for the fact that they produced no contemporary controversy. The industry of a biographer has only hunted up a single pamphlet, by one Bott, in which the 'Analogy' was attacked. And yet the books indicate an absorbing preoccupation in the controversies of the day. Butler has deeply pondered the ordinary arguments; he has brooded over them, worked them out, and set down his conclusions, as tersely—often, it must be added, as clumsily—as possible. The 'Analogy' has been built up like a coral reef by slow accretions of carefully digested matter. The style corresponds to the method. We may say, if we choose to be paradoxical, that the 'Analogy' is an almost unique example of a book which has survived, not merely in spite of, but almost by reason of, its faults of style. The paradox, indeed, holds only in so far as the faulty language is indicative of the effort to pack thought more closely than it will easily go. The defect results from a good motive. But it is also characteristic of the lonely thinker who forgets the necessity of expounding with sufficient clearness the arguments which have long been familiar to himself. And, in this sense, it is

indicative of a more serious weakness. Butler's mind, like the mind of every recluse, was apt to run in grooves. He endeavoured, as he tells us, to answer by anticipation every difficulty that could be suggested. But, unfortunately, he has always considered them from the same point of view. He has not verified his arguments by varying the centre of thought or contemplating his system from the outside. And thus his reasoning often reminds us of those knots which bind the faster the more they are pulled in a given direction, but fall asunder at the first strain from another quarter. The pursuit of truth, as he told Clarke, was the object of his life. Every page confirms his veracity. And yet the same letter shows the strong prepossessions with which he started. He is anxious, he says, to discover a demonstrative proof of the existence of God—doubtless, a most natural and innocent desire. Yet it is a desire which suggests the question, what would be his course if such a proof should not be forthcoming? Would he have the rare intellectual courage which enables a man to face the most appalling consequences? Might he not share the weakness of Don Quixote, and unconsciously resolve not to put his newly-framed armour to too severe a test? That some hidden weakness was lurking in his argument is suggested from a remarkable peculiarity of the 'Analogy.' It is a rare instance of a theological argument which may, with some plausibility, be called original; it has ever since its publication retained a high place in our literature; and many men of great ability, and in widely different schools of thought, have ascribed to it a profound influence upon their minds. James Mill and Dr. Newman, at the opposite poles of speculation, are typical examples of the lines of thought which may diverge from this common centre. And yet the book, like its author, remains, in some sense, isolated. It does not seem, so far as I can judge, to have materially affected the contemporary currents of thought. It has found more admirers than imitators, and the mine which it opened has not been extensively worked. One explanation is suggested by the names just mentioned. Though Butler is habitually described as amongst the ablest champions of Christianity, he has probably made few converts, and has clearly helped some thinkers towards scepticism. The fact is, as we shall see, that his

reasoning is open to applications which he never suspected. The absence of that power of looking through other men's eyes which can rarely be acquired by a lonely thinker, blinded him to one side of the question. The 'Analogy' impresses us in literature like some mass of rockpiercing strata of a different formation, unmoveable and undecayed, but yet solitary, exceptional, and barren.

3. Butler's aim is, in brief, to countermine the ordinary deist position. Fragmentary anticipations of his argument are to be found scattered here and there through many contemporary writers. But, as I have said, they are wanting in philosophical breadth and consistency. The orthodox reasoner of the time is beset by a difficulty which expresses his equivocal position. He half admits and half denies the deist assumptions. He professes to believe in such a God of nature as the deist postulates—a God whose attributes are discoverable by reason, and whose law is the embodiment of reason. But when this conception is confronted with the historical Deity of Jewish and Christian mythology, he begins to retract, and he asserts that, as a matter of fact, God has not been discovered by reason, and cannot be shown to have governed men according to the laws of reason. This is substantially to admit an irremovable discrepancy between theory and observation, and to cover it by the decent name of mystery. The difficulty could only be removed by looking more closely into the assumptions which both sides accepted with a suspicious facility. Before we can argue safely from our conceptions of the Deity, we must ask what they are, and how are they determined. Two assumptions, in fact, are made on all sides; first, that there is a God; and, secondly, that he is the God of the rationalists—the God, that is, whose attributes were demonstrated by Clarke, and accepted by Tindal. To take those doctrines for granted is to beg the ultimate questions of philosophy, and therefore to be inevitably superficial. The whole aim of Butler's book is summed up in his treatment of the secondary assumption as to the divine character. He takes for granted the assumption of the divine existence. We believe, he says substantially, in a God of nature, but the God of nature is such a God as nature reveals, and not the God who is

described by your *a priori* speculations. God, as known to us by the analogy of nature—that is to say, by that kind of imperfect induction which alone is available in these deep problems—is no longer different from the God revealed to us in the Bible; on the contrary, he appears, so far as our faculties can be trusted, to be the very same Being. The difficulty, therefore, of the orthodox argument disappears; and, instead of half granting and half admitting the appeal to reason, we can admit it frankly and unreservedly.

4. Meanwhile, Butler passes lightly over the ultimate problem. He takes it 'for proved, that there is an intelligent Author of nature, and natural Governor of the world.'[1] He accepts the validity of all the ordinary reasonings upon which this doctrine has been based; the arguments, that is, from analogy, from final causes, from abstract reasoning, from tradition, and from general consent.[1] He elsewhere accepts, in particular, the argument of Descartes or Anselm, derived from the necessary existence of an archetype corresponding to our idea of 'an infinite and immense eternal Being.'[2] Butler, therefore, does not address himself to atheists, if such there be, who dogmatically deny the existence of God; nor to the undoubtedly numerous class who, neither denying nor affirming, hold that our vision is limited to this world by a veil of impenetrable mystery. He excludes as chimerical the dark doubts which, to many readers, are the most conspicuous results of his arguments, and he assumes that all arguments for a God must make for such a God as his theory implies. A pressing difficulty is thus unconsciously evaded. Butler does not renounce the *a priori* line of reasoning, though it was probably a sense of its difficulties which led him to seek for a more tangible ground of controversy. He is content to leave it to others to discover the essential nature and attributes of the Deity; but, far from rebuking their presumption, or from suspecting any possible discrepancy between himself and them, he fully accepts their conclusions. His task is the collateral one of discovering in what character the Deity actually manifests himself to men. The difficulty, therefore, of the ordinary theologian is not so much solved as transferred to another application. For the difficulty of proving that

[1] Butler's Works, i. 7. [2] Ib. i. 130.

the God of nature is also the God of revelation, we have with Butler the difficulty of believing that the God known equally through nature and revelation can be the God of abstract speculation. In neglecting to face this question, or even to understand that any such question can arise, Butler, though going deeper than his less thoughtful colleagues, fails to probe the real depths of the question ; and he lays himself open to a retort from a scepticism which is not afraid to pass beyond the limits of accepted theology. A writer who would raise a firm system of belief must follow Descartes' principle of doubting whatever can be doubted. He must look carefully to every foundation of belief.

5. The belief in God and the belief in a soul are with Butler the primary articles of natural religion. The first is assumed ; the validity of the second is examined in the first chapter of the 'Analogy.' Though hesitatingly and in cautious language, he is here forced to interweave a proof of different character with the ordinary tissue of his argument. This rather heterogeneous element was due immediately to Clarke. A curious controversy between Clarke and Collins had for its pretext a singular crotchet of the learned nonjuror Dodwell. Dodwell's brain, bewildered with excessive reading, and crammed with obsolete theological curiosities, had excogitated a strange doctrine as to the natural mortality of the soul. Baptism by the successors of the Apostles could alone confer immortality. The souls of dissenters, it would seem, were to be revived by an express exertion of divine power, with a view to receiving their dues, whilst the souls of those who had never heard of Christ might be mercifully dismissed to insensibility. Clarke, instead of treating this absurdity with pity or contempt, wrote a solemn remonstrance to its author (1706) ; and Collins, as in the similar case of Whiston, caught at an opportunity of assailing established dogmas under cover of supporting an indisputably Christian writer. Four pamphlets by Collins received four elaborate replies from Clarke. As usual, the controversy gathered heat, and lost in relevancy towards the conclusion. Clarke's main argument is simple enough. Though drawn from the common armoury of his school, it is still used by controversialists with little modification. The soul cannot be material, for the pro-

perties of any aggregate of particles can be but the sum of the properties of the separate particles. As separate particles cannot think, no aggregate of particles can think. There must be an immaterial subject in which thought inheres, and as thought is an 'individual power'—incapable, that is, of analysis into simpler elements—this subject must be 'indiscerptible,' and therefore naturally immortal.

The argument, in short, is the familiar doctrine of Descartes, elaborated into quasi-mathematical shape,[1] and rendered more precise by help of the distinction between primary and secondary qualities. The mathematical qualities are inherent in matter. Others, like sound or smell, are not really qualities of matter, but modes of the thinking substance; others again, like 'magnetism and electricity,' are general names which express 'the effects of some determinations of certain streams of matter.'[1] Consciousness obviously cannot belong to either class of derivative qualities, nor can it be put in the same category with motion and figure, which, indeed, are but the formula for the opposite pole of existence. As consciousness must be a quality of something, and cannot be a quality of matter, the something must be immaterial.

6. Collins's reply is ineffective, in so far as he seems to admit the assumptions on which the conclusion is virtually given. He does not anticipate Berkeley's denial of matter, or rest, as a modern upholder of his position would do, upon our necessary inability to penetrate to the ultimate essences of things. At times he seems to change weapons with his antagonist. 'As far as I can judge,' he says, 'all this talk of the essences of things being unknown is a perfect mistake;'[2] and he accordingly pronounces the essence of matter to be solidity. Relying upon such hand-to-mouth modes of argument, he generally (in my judgment at least) leaves the logical victory with Clarke; though here and there he hits the true difficulties of his antagonist's position. He attempts, for example, to show that the production of 'roundness' from particles not themselves round is analogous to the production of thought from unthinking matter. Clarke fairly replies, though after some needless argumentation, that the difference between the whole and its parts is merely in the abstract name

[1] See it fully stated, Clarke's Works, iii. 795–799. [2] Ib. iii. 881.

and not in the thing.[1] Clarke, too, has an equal advantage in maintaining against Collins that it is impossible to regard thought as a 'mode of motion.' Any mode of combining things regarded as external to ourselves must result in an external product. To call motion thought is, in fact, to confuse the radical opposition of subjective and objective; and so long as Collins falls in with Clarke's fundamental method of representing that opposition as embodied in the distinction between primary and secondary qualities, he in vain attempts to give an air of plausibility to his escape from Clarke's conclusion. Elsewhere, as in the illustration of the egg, which runs through two or three letters, he presses his antagonist harder.[2] That consciousness does in fact arise from certain collocations of matter is a fact which Clarke struggles to evade rather awkwardly by the hypothesis of an 'immaterial principle' somehow added to the embryo.[3] But Collins does not seem to have a sufficiently firm grasp of principles to turn his opponent's weakness to account. The question recurs at intervals, though it is one of those which seem to be generally passed over in silence by a kind of tacit agreement. Andrew Baxter published a long 'Enquiry into the Soul' some years afterwards, which may be read by persons curious to study the effect of exploded metaphysics on a feeble, though ingenious, intellect; and Hume's posthumous essay, or notes for an essay, on the Immortality of the Soul, contains some rather obvious criticisms on the accepted doctrine. It is enough to notice Butler's reasoning.

7. Butler's correspondence with Clarke, a few years later, seems to imply that he was more or less sensible to the hollowness of the ground. In reference to one of Clarke's ontological arguments, Butler, then (1713) a student at Tewkesbury, asks the significant question—What is space? His doubts were not pressed very far, nor does he conceal his anxiety to be relieved from them. They would have taken him to the root of the questions suggested by Clarke's whole

[1] Clarke's Works, iii. 833.

[2] The same illustration, it may be noticed, appears in a similar controversy between Mr. Martineau and Mr. Herbert Spencer. See 'Contemporary Review,' April and May, 1872. Professor Tyndall refers to the same illustration, 'Fortnightly Review,' November 1875.

[3] See Clarke's Works, pp. 788, 789, 810.

philosophical method. Butler, however, seems to have thought that a sound thread of argument might be extricated from the web of questionable metaphysics. 'It has been argued,' he says, referring in a note to Clarke's letters, 'and, for anything appearing to the contrary, justly,'[1] that the unity of consciousness implies the unity of the conscious being; or, at least, as he presently says, with characteristic caution, there is 'no more difficulty in conceiving' the being to be a unit 'than in conceiving it to be a compound.'[2] In this case, our organised bodies would be no more parts of ourselves than any surrounding matter. Though 'experimental observations' cannot prove the doctrine, they 'fall in with it,'[3] and we are therefore somehow enabled to 'conclude certainly that, our gross organised bodies . . . are no parts of ourselves.'[3] Thus he persuades himself that our eyes and feet are in reality no more than glasses and crutches;[4] and, consequently, though the destruction of our bodies destroys the proof of our vitality, there is no ground to think that it destroys the living agents themselves. The familiar argument from the case of animals is met by the familiar appeal *ad ignorantiam*, and by the more specific argument that the higher intellectual faculties appear to be, in some way, independent of our senses.[5]

8. The discussion is characteristic of Butler's whole method. Whatever plausibility it possesses, is due to the preliminary assumption of the unity and separate existence of the soul. Butler's admission that this assumption is not proved by observation, but falls in with it, is equivalent to saying that observation does not contradict it. But neither, it is plain, can observation really confirm it. Nobody would argue in the sphere of observation that, because a man can in some sense do without his legs, he can therefore survive in some sense without his brain; or that because parts of the organism are not essential to life, therefore the whole organism is superfluous. The whole hypothesis of an independent entity called the soul is simply irrelevant from the scientific point of view; and to infer from its being not upset that it is confirmed is a palpable fallacy. Butler, however, by dwelling exclusively upon the absence of direct contradiction, and sinking the

[1] Butler, i. 21.
[2] Ib. p. 22.
[3] Ib. p. 23.
[4] Ib. p. 28.
[5] Ib. p. 31.

absence of confirmation, converts absolute ignorance into the likeness of some degree of positive knowledge. He obtains, that is, a delusive appearance of independent scientific grounds for what is really a purely *a priori* deduction. He finds it desirable, however, to add that the credibility of a future state answers 'all the purposes of religion' as a demonstrative proof would do.[1] The chances are so awful that we cannot afford to neglect them. If there is no presumption against the existence of heaven and hell, there is a presumption for it; or, at least, a plain reason for acting as though it were a fact. The doctrine of probability which we thus meet at the beginning of Butler's whole argument colours the whole book. It is his unique distinction amongst theologians that, whilst writhing in the jaws of a dilemma, he refrains from positively denying that any dilemma exists. Yet even Butler will not admit that the doubts which he allows to be possible should influence our conduct. And thus he is tempted to attempt the impossible feat of transmuting blank ignorance into some semblance of positive knowledge. The difficulty in one shape or another underlies his whole argument.

9. The essential data for a creed being thus provided, Butler has to turn them to account. His thesis is, as we have seen, that the God of nature resembles the God of revelation. He disperses with true insight one class of fallacies which had gathered round the question. The ordinary language implied an untenable distinction between divine and natural. Divines, for example, thought that some heresy lurked in the assertion that the rewards and penalties of another state would be the 'natural' consequences of our actions.[2] Butler sees the distinction to be unphilosophical. All God's commands are at once divine and natural. 'Natural' can only mean 'stated, fixed, or settled.'[3] Civil government is itself natural, if natural be taken in this wider sense; and civil punishments are, therefore, part of the 'natural' punishment of sin.[4] Butler, of course, guards himself from too unreserved an acceptance of his own principles. 'For aught we know,' he says, future punishment may be the 'natural consequence of

[1] Butler, i. 38.

[2] See *e.g.* Warburton, Works, iii. 15; Conybeare against Tindal, p. 389; Leland against Tindal, i. 234.

[3] Butler's Works, i. 37.

[4] Ib. i. 49.

vice,'[1] in the same sense as the present punishments. 'For aught I see,' we are afterwards told, it comes to the same thing whether this be the case or not.[2] He disposes in the same way of the equally futile distinction between positive and moral precepts, which reflected the ordinary assumption of an arbitrary element in the divine nature. 'Moral precepts,' he says, 'are precepts the reason of which we see; positive precepts are precepts the reason of which we do not see.'[3] He is, of course, careful to add that 'there is not altogether so much reason for the determination of this question' (as to the relative claims of the two classes of commands) 'as some people seem to think.'[4] To make an unnecessary assumption, however undeniable, would apparently have been torture to his strangely cautious understanding.

10. So far the case seems to be clear. The laws of nature are the laws of God, and the distinctions drawn by divines who feared lest God should be lost in nature were plainly irrelevant. Yet Butler is, of course, equally alive to that danger. His God must be a real governor, separate from the universe. God's conduct, as he says (though he does not hold the dogma to be strictly relevant to his argument), must be determined by a certain 'moral fitness and unfitness of actions prior to all will whatever.'[5] Something must exist outside of God. Some material must be provided upon which the divine will may operate. And yet, if nature be related to God as the effect to the cause, how are we to infer anything from nature but a counterpart of nature? From the ontological point of view, we have a difficulty in distinguishing between God and pure being. From Butler's experiential point of view, it seems to be equally difficult to distinguish between God and the sum of all the forces of the universe. It is necessary for his purpose to show that the Author of nature has 'some character or other;'[6] something, as he explains, analogous to that which in men we call 'temper, taste, disposition, practical principles; that whole frame of mind from which we act in one way rather than another.'[6] We are able to assign character to individuals and classes,

[1] Butler's Works, i. 186.
[2] Ib. i. 235.
[3] Ib. i. 187.
[4] Ib. i. 190.
[5] Ib. i. 343.
[6] Ib. i. 136, and note.

because we can stand outside them, compare them with some external standard, or measure them by each other. But how is this method to be applied to the Whole? Where is our fixed element in this shifting phenomena of experience which will enable us to determine their relation not to each other, but to the absolute and eternal? If all exists by God's will, how can the observation of particular existences reveal a special purpose distinct from the general will implied in creation? Divines had boldly argued from the immunity of vice in this world to its punishment in the next. Given some independent source of knowledge as to the attributes of God, the argument might be valid; but from the bare fact by itself we can only reach such a conclusion by inverting all the canons of induction. The whole pith of the 'Analogy' is given by the answer to this difficulty. The mere fact of injustice in this world cannot, as Butler sees, prove justice in the next. Why, as one of his objectors asks—and Butler's objectors are never men of straw—should we not suppose that 'things may be now going on throughout the universe, and may go on hereafter, in the same mixed way as here at present upon earth?'[1] Butler's reply admits in substance that we cannot infer from the world as we see it anything but a similar world; but we may, he thinks, show that the facts fall in with a doctrine which implies a very different world. The 'usual known arguments' in behalf of a future state of retribution are, in his opinion, 'plainly unanswerable.'[2] Though he renounces direct proof, he thinks that he can discover a confirmation of them in experience. What, for example, if some system could be detected amidst the apparent uncertainty of distribution? He has remarked that the good and bad tendencies of virtue and vice are 'essential, and founded in the nature of things, whereas the hindrances to their becoming effect are, in numberless cases, not necessary but artificial only.'[3] Does not this observation make it probable that, in another world, the tendencies will work themselves out more clearly? The argument seems to involve a distinction between natural and artificial as arbitrary as those which Butler has exposed. We must, however, look more minutely into the argument, to see how he conceives the question.

[1] Butler's Works, i. 80. [2] Ib. i. 81. [3] Ib. i. 83.

11. A striking chapter is devoted to prove that we can dimly discern a vast providential scheme.[1] Since we see only a part, we may infer that all objections to its justice and wisdom are founded in our ignorance; and yet we can see enough to be certain that it exists. The vast mass of observable phenomena is not a chaos, but an organised system. Besides simply enumerating facts, we can detect principles of arrangement which will justify a partial induction. Man is intelligible, so far as he is intelligible, as a fraction, not as an integer; the world is one province of an ordered universe. The hypothesis of a divine government supplies the necessary clue to the bewildering labyrinth. This world and the next tally in such a manner that our observations, though imperfect, give dim indications of the complementary sphere. The relation between this and a very different set of theories is significant. It is evident, says Butler, that the 'course of things which comes within our view, is connected with somewhat, past, present, and future, beyond it. So that we are placed, as one may speak, in the middle of a scheme, not a fixed, but a progressive one, every way incomprehensible; incomprehensible, in a manner equally, with respect to what has been, what now is, and what shall be hereafter.'[2] Men accustomed to regard the world as the scene of a gradual evolution may adapt the phrase to their own purposes. We may perceive, they might say, in the midst of mysteries, a tendency to the development of certain social and intellectual types, which it is our duty to forward or to retard. But Butler has in view a different series. The successive terms are not the savage, the civilised being, and the ideal man of the golden age to come; but corrupt man—man perfected here by grace, or ruined by rejecting it, and man in a state of final reward or punishment. His induction, one may say, cuts the line of scientific induction at right angles. It must then be justified by some extra-scientific assumption. The scientific series remains within the limits of experience. The first terms, already known by observation, contain the law which will be revealed to future observers. Butler's series contains a transcendental element. To verify it we must be able to discover a standing-point outside the world of the senses; and find

[1] 'Analogy,' part i. ch. vii.

[2] Butler's Works, i. 162.

an absolute scale upon which to measure the relation of God to man.

12. The second and third chapters of the first part show us how this external standing-point is to be attained. Butler starts from the undeniable fact that happiness depends in great measure upon conduct. We are enabled 'to foresee,' he says, 'with more or less clearness, that, if we act so and so, we shall have such enjoyments ; if so and so, such sufferings.'[1] 'This,' an objector replies, 'is to be ascribed to the general course of nature.' 'True,' says Butler, 'that is the very thing I am contending for.'[1] The course of nature is the order of things appointed by the Author of nature. God or nature—the two words are so far interchangeable—has affixed pain and pleasure to different courses of action. This, in theological language, is to admit that God governs us. It matters not whether we suppose God to be always acting directly or that his laws operate without further intervention. If the laws of civil magistrates operated automatically and unerringly, we should still be under their government, though in a much higher degree. Here, then, is a solid statement of undeniable fact. God governs. Further, God is a moral governor. The penalties which he inflicts are affixed to vicious courses, and the rewards to virtuous courses. Of the general fact, Butler admits no doubt. Neither is it doubtful that, perplexing as may be the distribution of happiness and misery, virtue *as such* is rewarded, and vice *as such* punished. The nature with which we are endowed, and the power which we can exercise over others, provide certain sanctions ; amongst which we must reckon the penalties of civil governors, and the hopes and fears of futurity, which—whatever their origin—undoubtedly exist. Our intuitive moral judgment entitles us to set aside apparently conflicting cases, in which impulses, implanted in us for good purposes, have been perverted to the punishment of the good and reward of the bad. And, finally, the intrinsic excellence of virtue is illustrated by the hypothetical case of a perfectly virtuous kingdom, which must bring the whole world under its empire, either 'by what must be allowed to be just conquest,'[2] or by the voluntary submission

[1] Butler's Works, i. 42. [2] Ib. i. 79.

of less happily constituted races. The argument would fall in with an exposition of the doctrine of 'the survival of the fittest;' and indeed the statement is substantially that races will flourish as they adapt themselves to the laws of nature.

13. This is the main substance of Butler's constructive argument, and it suggests an obvious criticism. The bare statement that happiness and misery follow certain courses is almost trivial. It receives a peculiar colouring in Butler's hands, from his introduction of the words reward and punishment. How then do we know that the suffering which follows sin is a divinely inflicted punishment, whilst the suffering implied in self-sacrifice or submission to tyranny is merely a proof of the perversion of natural instincts? To answer that question, we must know what is meant by virtue. The utilitarian answer—soon to be explicitly given by Hume—is obvious. Virtue is that which promotes the happiness of mankind. To show, then, that virtue is conducive to happiness is to show that virtue is virtue. Temperance, for example, is virtuous because, and in so far as, it is conducive to health. To represent health as a divine reward annexed to temperance is to fall into the error of the person who wondered at the goodness of providence in bringing navigable rivers by large towns. The statement, indeed, becomes more complex in regard to the social virtues; where the motive of the individual may conflict with the interests of the race. A modern disciple of the derivative school of morality would say that the moral law is substantially a code of rules, worked out by more or less conscious experience, which express the most obvious conditions of general well-being. So far as they are accurately known, the effect of observing them must be to increase the general sum of happiness. That part of morality which coincides with personal prudence must generally increase the happiness of the individual. The 'altruist' instincts will not have that effect so uniformly, because the present social order is far from allowing a perfect harmony between the individual and the whole organism. Still, as Butler very rightly argues, the mass will approve, and to that extent reward, qualities which they recognise as plainly beneficial to themselves; and the fact of our mutual dependence

implies, as a condition of social existence, that the interests of the mass and of its units must coincide through a great part of our relations. Justice will make the just man happier, because it secures one essential condition of happiness, namely, the goodwill of his fellows. A similar inversion naturally follows whenever a scientific view is substituted for a view based upon the doctrine of final causes. What to Butler seems to be a mysterious harmony appears in a derivative system of morality as the necessary result of the conditions of existence. Any special inference as to a supposed intention of the Divine legislator disappears or melts into the general consideration of a fixed order in the universe. Butler's blindness to this very obvious inversion of his argument is explained by the fact that he contemplated utilitarianism only in its crudest form, as sanctioning individual selfishness.[1] The social virtues of veracity, justice, and public spirit, which Hume described as 'artificial,' appeared to him as necessarily implying the existence of an independent moral faculty, inasmuch as their immediate motive was unselfish. Their rewards, therefore, seemed to be annexed by a divine regulation, even when he goes far towards explaining their natural origin.

14. Here, then, is that absolute standing-point which Butler needed. His essential doctrine is the independent system of morality. Without it, his arguments crumble; with it, we can understand their plausibility. Denying that the consequences of an action are directly or indirectly the determining causes of its morality, the consequences, so far as they affect the agent, appear to him to be plainly rewards or punishments, annexed by the Divine Governor. The God whom Butler worships is, in fact, the human conscience deified. The evidence of his existence and interest in the world rests not on certain miracles wrought some centuries ago in Palestine, but on that great standing miracle—the oracle implanted in every man's breast. For what can be

[1] See especially the dissertation on the nature of virtue, where the utilitarian view is emphatically rejected. The language of some writers might, he thinks, lead to the impression that virtue consists in aiming at the promotion of human happiness in this life, and vice in the contrary; 'than which mistakes none can be conceived more terrible' (Butler's Works, i. 382).

more miraculous than an infallible faculty, not derived from others or developed by the pressure of society and the external world, but absolute, authoritative, and inexplicable? Each of us is provided by nature with a compass pointing undeviatingly to celestial regions. By that gift we can recognise the giver and understand his character. The character of the God of nature is summed up by saying that he loves virtue and hates vice. Having proved this, our course is clear. We can trace the great outlines of the providential scheme. The world is no longer a scene where forces are steadily working for inscrutable ends, wielded by a Being of whose character, if he has a character, we have not the dimmest conception; where we can only say that the races succeed best which are most in harmony with the conditions; and where, if we can vaguely forecast the future of the race, we can see no traces of care for individuals. To Butler the individual is the centre of interest. God is the Almighty chemist, testing all men in his crucibles; the process—in what Butler calls the state of probation—either strengthens or weakens the qualities in which he delights; he places the thrice-tried jewels in the cabinet of heaven; and throws aside the rest upon the heap of refuse called hell.

15. Will this theory fit the facts? Can we regard this world as a forcing-house, in which qualities primarily suited for another world are stimulated to activity? The discipline of life clearly trains the race in habits which are useful here, whatever they may be hereafter. Butler seizes upon this fact as affording an instructive analogy. After describing the process by which prudence is fostered in our temporal capacity,[1] he adds: 'Substitute now the word future for temporal, and virtue for prudence, and it' (the description of our state of trial in our temporal capacity) 'will be just as proper a description of our state of trial in our religious capacity, so analogous are they to each other.'[2] Are

[1] Butler hesitates as to calling prudence a virtue. In part i. ch. iii., and in the 'Dissertation on the Nature of Virtue,' he inclines to call it a part of virtue. In part i. ch. iii. the stress laid on the analogy between prudence and virtue seems to imply that one cannot be part of the other. But the argument does not seem to be really affected.

[2] P. 90.

they not rather identical? Virtue, on Butler's showing, would seem to be distinguished from prudence—if any distinction be necessary—by the circumstance that prudence guards us against temporal, as virtue against spiritual, dangers. The likeness, indeed, is so marked that Butler anticipates, though he properly repels, the charge, that with him virtue is but a discipline and strengthening of self-love.[1] The likeness or identity of the two leads, however, to a serious difficulty. In the case of prudence, we evidently mean by 'discipline' that the conditions of our existence are such as to make prudence useful. Must it not mean the same in the case of virtue? The process described as the moral government of God, means that, on the whole, virtue is useful in this world. Butler, it is true, regards virtue as a plant intended to flourish more vigorously in another world. The Almighty gardener is cultivating plants of an odour too ethereal for our earthly perceptions. If, in fact, this could be made out with any show of plausibility; if, that is, we could prove that the discipline of this life tended to develop qualities fitted for another life, Butler's argument would be forcible. But, unfortunately, this is just what the 'Analogy' cannot possibly prove, or even tend to prove. The very meaning of the supposed discipline is that virtue is advantageous under existing conditions. The whole evidence open to him by the very nature of his argument is the tendency of the present state to encourage virtue. So far as virtue is not profitable here, his argument collapses. And yet his conclusion is only plausible so far as it is profitable in a different state from this. If, in short, he could point to some quality, encouraged by the existing conditions, and yet not useful under present conditions, his case would have a certain support. But as qualities are encouraged just so far as they are useful—as the utility is the sole evidence of the supposed encouragement—he is in a dilemma, from which there is no escape.

16. Indeed, he states the theory himself. 'Our nature,' he says, 'corresponds to our external condition. Without this correspondence, there would be no possibility of any such thing as human life and happiness; which life and happiness are, therefore, a *result* from our nature and condition jointly;

[1] Butler's Works, i. 122.

meaning by human life, not living in the literal sense, but the whole complex notion commonly understood by those words.'[1] A modern evolutionist could not say more plainly that happiness results from the harmony between the organism and its environment, and the natural inference is that the science of morality is simply a statement of the rules by which that harmony is promoted. It remains true, of course, that, as Butler labours to show with much ingenuity, qualities strengthened by our discipline in this life may be useful in another life. Meanwhile, it cannot be argued, from the mere absence of harmony here, that there must be harmony elsewhere; or that, because, under existing conditions, many virtues run to waste, and conduct regulated by a regard to general rules produces misery instead of happiness in particular cases, the wasted qualities will be turned to account in a different order. Butler is too logical to draw this as an inference, though he seems to countenance the opinion inculcated. He is content to argue, in his usual method, that the assumed utility of virtue in the next world is consistent with the facts of observation, without saying explicitly that observation suggests or necessitates the assumption.

17. Meanwhile, he tries to turn the facts to account in a rather startling way. 'The present state,' he says, 'is so far from proving in effect a discipline of virtue to the generality of men, that, on the contrary, they seem to make it a discipline of vice.' The garden of the Lord produces more weeds than flowers. And what is the explanation? Of the numerous seeds prepared for growth, 'we do not see that one in a million actually' comes to perfection. 'Yet,' he adds, 'no one who does not deny all final causes, will deny' that these seeds answer the end for which they were designed by nature. 'And,' he concludes, 'I cannot forbear adding, though it is not to the present purpose, that the *appearance* of such an amazing *waste* in nature, with respect to these seeds and bodies, by foreign causes, is to us as unaccountable as, what is much more terrible, the present and future ruin of so many moral agents by themselves, *i.e.*, by vice.'[2] The fact, thus candidly acknowledged by Butler, throws a strange light upon his theory. It is one of the facts which science takes into

[1] Butler's Works, i. 98.

[2] Ib. i. 120, 121.

account as explaining the gradual adaptation of the race to its new conditions of life. From Butler's point of view, it seems to imply either that the plan of the Almighty is a failure, or that he is not a benevolent agent. The world is a state of probation, and it is a probation which ruins the vast majority of those who undergo it. The dying out of drunkards may explain how the race gradually increases in sobriety; but the death of ten drunkards, to say nothing of the punishment of their posterity, seems to be a strangely awkward way of teaching one man to be sober in a world where, so far as we know, there is to be no more drinking. Butler suggests what no one can deny, that such qualities as 'veracity, justice, and charity' may be useful elsewhere.[1] So, for anything we can tell, may temperance, soberness, and chastity. Yet, admitting the possibility, and admitting that a state of probation here may be the prologue to a state in which there is no probation, we see that Butler has once more succeeded in proving only that the facts do not necessarily contradict the theory. The whole appearance of plausibility is obtained by stating undeniable facts in his own language, and then assuming that, because they can be so stated, the theory embodied in the language is confirmed. Call the evil consequences of vice its punishment; the development of character under the action of circumstances, probation; take for granted the existence of a moral governor, and a separate and indestructible entity called the soul; and, undoubtedly, theology will give an interpretation of the facts which, though it may conflict with our preconceived notions of divine benevolence, does not conflict with the facts observed.

18. The great difficulty remains. Butler's God is revealed through conscience. Does his conscience reveal a just God? This is the old and familiar difficulty, which has tasked the ingenuity of innumerable thinkers. Why does the potter complain of his pots? Is it divine or childish to set puppets in motion, and be angry because they do not work out the supposed design? Who is to blame if we, feeble creatures of circumstance, are such as circumstances, or, if you will, the divine system of government, has made us? Because we have strayed where we had no light, and been fused by a

[1] Butler's Works, i. 109.

probationary fire too hot for our constitutions, are we to be everlastingly tortured? Butler's treatment of this ever-recurring problem is probably the weakest part of his argument. He argues that the opinion of fatalism or necessity is not necessarily opposed to religion, or rather that the 'absurd supposition,' as he calls it, of 'universal necessity,' must be reconcileable to religion, that is, to his theological system, if it be reconcileable to facts given by experience.[1] The statement indicates at once a confusion between two really contradictory theories. 'Universal necessity' makes 'fatalism' impossible; for fatalism assumes what necessity excludes, the existence of an arbitrary element in the universe. Butler, for example, argues at length, and for a moment a humorous smile seems to flit across his grave countenance, that a boy brought up without fear or shame would 'be the plague of all about him and of himself too, even to his own destruction.'[2] There cannot be a doubt of it. If the boy thought that he was not blamable for lying because a dark power, called fate, moved his tongue; or that he might as well jump out of the window as walk through the door, because fate had decided whether he should die or live, that boy would soon cease to plague anybody in this world. The hypothesis, however, of a fate which determines certain points in the chain of events, and does not determine the intermediate points, is not only absurd in itself, but radically opposed to the doctrine of necessity. 'Necessity' would make the boy jump out of window if he was to be killed, or walk out of the door if he was to live. As a fatalist, the boy might be right in holding that he was not to be blamed for lying, because acting under outward compulsion. As a necessitarian he would be illogical. Praise and blame are as much matters of necessity as anything else, and indeed are only intelligible on the assumption that acts are caused; and that lying, therefore, implies a certain disposition. The two doctrines clash irreconcilably, and Butler's confusion between them is one more proof of his feebleness in dealing with purely metaphysical questions. In this respect he is but a child compared with such men as Hume, Hobbes, or Jonathan Edwards.

19. Butler's position, however, is instructive. He remarks

[1] Butler's Works, i. 128. [2] i. 132.

very truly that the doctrine of necessity does not explain 'how things came to be and to continue as they are,' but only adds the circumstance that they could not have been otherwise.[1] The necessitarians and the advocates of free-will would alike infer an architect from a house, whether the architect were conceived as a free or a necessary agent. It would appear, then, that the doctrine of necessity, consistently carried out, has no practical bearing; like an atmosphere pressing equally in all directions, it leaves the previous equilibrium unaltered; affecting no truth, or all truth equally, it will not affect our view of facts. The doctrine of necessity, it would be more accurate to say, so far as it is equivalent to the assertion of universal causation, gives an essential postulate for all reasonings about fact, but does not affect one reason more than another. Necessity, regarded as an external entity, compelling events to conform to their laws, is a metaphysical figment, which causes nothing but confusion. It is in this sense, however, that Butler takes the doctrine. His 'necessity' is a dark power, coercing God and man alike. It belongs to the super-divine sphere—if the phrase may be used—where exists the eternal and immutable nature of things by which even God's will is determined. Butler argues that such a necessity would destroy all morality. Destroying the injustice of the murder, it would destroy also the injustice of punishing murder.[2] And thus the Divine judge must be excused on the very plea which we advance to excuse the criminal.

20. The responsibility, it would be more accurate to say, is transferred to the new God called Necessity. If, however, Necessity, as in the more profound theology, means God's will, the answer becomes irrelevant. God, being subject to no external coercions, cannot be excused because he forces himself to punish. The argument really involves a confusion which lies at the root of Butler's method. It is in substance that the doctrine of necessity, and, therefore, its scientific successor, the doctrine of universal causation, must destroy the conception of desert—which from his point of view is an essential part of the conception of morality—as between man and man, along with the conception of desert as between man and God. The fal-

[1] Butler's Works, i. 129. [2] i. 136.

lacy is clear. In speaking of desert between two agents, we imply that they are subject to a law which defines their relations, and that the action in respect of which desert accrues is independent of the will of the agent obliged. But the conception fails us when one agent is supposed to be both the sole source of law and the determining cause of the character and surroundings of the other. The category which is applicable to the conduct of finite beings breaks down when one being is supposed infinite. Man can have no rights as against God. A sovereign power can do no legal wrong, because law means that which the sovereign wills. God can do no moral wrong, because, however we settle the question of precedence, his will and the moral law necessarily coincide. Regard God as the sole cause, and the words just and unjust can have no reference to him, whilst they retain their full meaning in regard to human beings. We may still ask whether he is, or is not, benevolent, but not, in any proper sense of the words, whether he is or is not just. Butler does not contemplate this mode of conceiving the case. He assumes that a doctrine which deprives desert of an absolute meaning must also destroy its relative meaning. His God, I have said, is revealed by conscience. He is the God of whom our hearts tell us that he will punish our sins; and, therefore, the God who leaves to us a certain sphere of independent action. When the conceptions applicable to the case of a finite moral governor are transferred to the case of an infinite cause, contradictions necessarily emerge. The doctrine of the penal character of suffering, which is intelligible in one case, becomes monstrous in the other; and thus Butler's assumption of the first article of his creed allows him to overlook the fact that the God proved by ontological reasoning is really a different being from the God assumed by the conscience.

21. From this want of philosophical clearness his final reply to objectors becomes strangely unsatisfactory. Government by reward and punishment, the necessitarian is supposed to say, 'must go upon supposition that we are free and not necessary agents. And it is incredible that the Author of nature should govern us upon a supposition as true which he knows to be false; and, therefore, absurd to think that he will reward and punish us for our actions hereafter; especially that he will do

it under the notion that they are of good or ill desert.' Butler replies: 'The whole constitution and course of things' shows 'beyond doubt that the conclusion from this argument is false, wherever the fallacy lies.' The fallacy lies, as he thinks, in the belief that we are necessary agents. If that belief be right, the fallacy must lie in the assumption 'that it is incredible necessary agents should be rewarded or punished.'[1] And why? Because, as a matter of fact, God does reward and punish 'even brute creatures,' and punishes and rewards men in respect of actions to which the sense of desert has been annexed. Butler's identification of suffering with punishment has become so indelible, that he thus treats it as simple matter of fact; and is appalled by no conclusion to which it leads when for the conception of a Governor we substitute the conception of a Creator and Sustainer of the universe.

22. To Butler, of course, the difficulty is masked by the theory of free-will—the device by which most theologians justify God's wrath with the work of his own hands. Thinkers who proceeded by a different method saw that the device was in any case insufficient. When God is presented as equivalent to nature, it matters little whether we do or do not concede to man that trifling capacity for modifying his destiny which we call free-will. The utmost amplitude that we can conceive implies but a kind of futile wriggling upon the hook implanted in our vitals and drawn by irresistible power. Let the will be 'free,' yet we must admit, and Butler's theory of 'probation' emphasises the fact, that nature turns out murderers as regularly as rattlesnakes. The omniscient and omnipotent Being who made and exposed us to temptation must surely have known, or at least have formed a shrewd suspicion about, our probable fate. No evasion can blind us to the true bearing of Butler's statement. God made men liable to sin; he placed them where they were certain to sin; he damns them everlastingly for sinning. This is the road by which the 'Analogy' leads to Atheism. If this be the logical result of accepting theories, better believe in no God at all. If nature reveals to us a being who acts upon such principles, and will probably carry them out more systematically in another world, let us dispel the hideous night-

[1] Butler's Works, i. 145–6.

mare by holding that God and a future life are priestly fictions. Butler appeals to conscience, and conscience, as interpreted by him, reveals Almighty injustice seated on the throne of the universe. If suffering is punishment, and punishment distributed as recklessly as suffering, belief in theology becomes an insult to humanity.

23. These consequences, however, are comparatively in the background in the first part of the 'Analogy;' for there our attention is fixed chiefly on the appearances of distributive justice. They recur in a darker shape in the second part, which deals with revealed religion. Butler, though he takes a deeper view than his contemporaries of the significance of Christianity, has no special qualifications for dealing with historical evidence. His most original remarks apply to the theory of the Atonement, and it is probably this part of the 'Analogy' upon which the wisdom of succeeding divines has most delighted to dwell. The argument is simple. That we should suffer for the sin of our parents is only in accordance with the general course of providence.[1] The scheme of redemption is equally conformable to observation; for 'vicarious punishment is a providential appointment of every day's experience.'[2] Human punishments are sufferings inflicted upon the criminal on account of his crimes. The chief argument of the first part of the 'Analogy' relies upon the statement that this is approximately true of divine punishments. We are now invited to attend to a different, and it would seem contradictory, series of facts. Divine punishments sometimes strike the virtuous person on account of his virtue; they often miss the vicious person on account of his vice; they constantly and systematically strike the innocent person instead of the guilty; and the penalty is not even roughly proportioned to the offence. Why, because they resemble punishment in one respect, should we call them punishments at all? Simply because Butler's conscience has told him that a certain Being is the avenger of sin; because he has identified this Being with nature, and has therefore inferred that wherever nature produces pleasure or pain, they are produced as sanctioning the criminal law of the universe. Happiness and misery are but the reflections of divine gratitude or vengeance,

[1] Butler's Works, i. 245. [2] i. 254.

and therefore divine rewards and penalties appear to be inflicted pretty nearly at random.

24. The difficulty is exaggerated in the second part of the book because it is not diminished. 'What men require,' says Butler, with unusual unfairness, 'is to have all difficulties cleared.'[1] What they really expect is that a divine revelation should make some difficulties clearer. Revelation, if it did not solve the enigma, might at least show it to be soluble. In answer to a similar difficulty, Butler complains that the absence of proof is turned into a positive argument; or, as he elsewhere says, 'over and above the force of each particular difficulty or objection, these difficulties and objections are turned into positive arguments against the truth of revelation.'[2] Butler may be exposed to a similar retort; for when he argues that 'speculative difficulties' are probationary in the same sense as 'external temptations,' he comes near converting the deficiency of proof into a positive ground of belief.[3] Such reasoning provokes the criticism most commonly directed against the 'Analogy.' It is an attempt to meet difficulties, by suggesting equal or greater difficulties. It should, therefore, lead to scepticism rather than to conviction. Butler, as usual, anticipates and tries to meet the objection. It is a 'poor thing,' says the objector, 'to solve difficulties in revelation by saying that there are the same in natural religion.'[4] Butler's reply is more obscure than usual, and has an air of depression very unlike the triumphant summing up of the ordinary controversialist. It is a poor thing, perhaps; but the epithet poor may be applied to most things in human life. 'It is most readily acknowledged,' he says again, 'that the foregoing treatise is not satisfactory, very far from it; but so would any natural institution of life appear if reduced into a system, together with its evidence.' The last words, obscure even for Butler, reflect the general perplexity produced by his contemplation of this troublous world. He retires upon the one main principle of his book. We are under the moral government of God. That is plain, whatever is doubtful. The argument, he admits, proves the credibility, not the reasonableness, of religion; except in so far as the existence of the

[1] Butler's Works, i. 332.
[2] Ib. i. 258, 335.
[3] Ib. i. 272.
[4] Ib. i. 331.

laws is a sufficient proof of their wisdom and justice. At any rate, there is proof enough to make obedience judicious. In matters of health or money, we have to act upon insufficient evidence. Why not in matters of salvation? Hell is probable enough to be worth avoiding.[1]

25. Of revelation, as of natural religion, Butler has shown that it does not contradict the testimony of facts. That conclusion is, with him, equivalent to a strong presumption in its favour. The plausibility of such a theory is obvious in this, as in the other case. Religious theories have been suggested to men by the observation of facts, and are an attempt to state them as coloured by the imagination. There is nothing, therefore, surprising to us in the circumstance that a religious doctrine which has embodied the conclusions of many generations of the most civilised races and the greatest of intellects, should give a statement not obviously in conflict with universal experience. That it should be so far tenable was a condition of its existence, and is therefore no proof of its supernatural origin. Butler, who only contemplated as possible the alternatives of a divine inspiration or direct imposture, just as he held that morality must be revealed through an independent faculty or regarded as a human fiction, naturally estimated the value of this coherence between fact and theory by a different scale. And yet there is a wide gulf, even from his own point of view, between his arguments and the acceptance of an implicit belief in Christian revelation. He seems to have shown at most that it may be true. His version of the facts will stand till a better has been suggested; and whilst it stands, it is wise to act upon it. The gulf, however, was filled in Butler's mind by a series of tacit assumptions. He has taken for granted, as I have pointed out, the answers to the most vital questions of philosophy. He tells us[2] that he has omitted to rely upon the two great doctrines of the freedom of the will and the independent origin of morality, because, though he held them, they were disputed by his antagonists. Yet, as we have seen, they are implicitly assumed throughout; and, in addition to them, he assumes the doctrines of the existence of God and of the soul; and assumes,

[1] See this doctrine burlesqued in Price's 'Morality.'

[2] Butler's Works, i. 343.

moreover, that those doctrines can be established in the sense required for his argument. Grant that there is a God who is a moral governor, and a soul which is an immortal entity; that the soul is in some sense independent of God and circumstances, and that morality is not determined by the conditions of human life; and Butler has shown that the facts of observation may be fitted into his framework of theory. Regarding those assumptions as having a strong *a priori* probability, and further holding that the Christian doctrine is practically the only alternative to Atheism, he thinks that this argument is not only negatively strong, but may in some sense stand by itself. It may force even those who start by denying the truth of Christianity to admit 'the absurdity of all attempts to prove Christianity false, the plain undoubted credibility of it;' and he adds, rather vaguely, a hope that it will prove 'a good deal more.'[1] The *Conclusion* reiterates his position. God's existence being proved by the indications of design, infidelity is the result of attending to the difficulties involved in Christianity and neglecting those involved in natural religion. The case fairly stated, it is plain that 'there is not any peculiar presumption against Christianity.' Even doubt implies that there is some evidence in its favour, and enough to compel our serious attention. The lowest degree of opinion possible to the candid mind is a 'serious apprehension' that Christianity may be true, 'joined with doubt whether it be so;' and even such a state of mind about Christianity 'lays persons under the strongest obligations in regard to it throughout the whole of their life; a regard, not the same exactly, but in many respects the same with what a full conviction of its truth would lay men under.' That is the last effort to represent doubt as a ground for action.

26. Butler, in spite of all the eulogies of his admirers, was no philosopher in the strict sense of that word. The essence of his method, as of that of the common-sense school, to whom he is most nearly related, is to pass by those ultimate problems which are strictly called philosophical. The attempt to frame a religious theory without thoroughly sounding its foundations led to the inevitable result. Butler fails to understand that his assertions read by the light of a different set

[1] Butler's Works, i. 346.

of assumptions would lead to a totally different result. His conclusions appear to some minds to be a *reductio ad absurdum* of his principles. Even theologians should be slow to praise the philosophical acuteness of a writer whose defence of Christianity is so easily convertible into an attack upon theology. It is not upon this side that we must look for the secret of Butler's greatness. His attitude is impressive from the moral side alone; but from that side its grandeur is undeniable. In the 'Analogy,' as distinctly as in the Sermons, the deification of the conscience is the beginning, middle, and end of Butler's preaching. Duty is his last word. Whatever doubts and troubles beset him, he adheres to the firm conviction that the secret of the universe is revealed, so far as it is revealed, through morality. Removing the colouring of theological dogma, his doctrine thus becomes a lofty stoicism. Whatever happens, and whatever prospects are revealed, he will hold to this creed. Read by the light of this belief, all suffering becomes punishment. The difficulty of reconciling this with the actual distribution of happiness presses upon him; but all difficulties must be faced. The doctrine seems to imply that God is unjust. The conclusion is horrible, and, of course, 'there must be a mistake somewhere;' but it cannot be in his original principle. The doctrines learnt from revelation increase the difficulty, but never overwhelm his faith. Men suffer here, as Butler urges, and suffer 'irremediably' for a certain amount of folly and vice. Here, however, we have the remedy of death—a remedy not available to save us from the Almighty avenger. If, then, suffering be punishment, analogy suggests that everlasting torture will punish the misdeeds of the most frail and sorely tempted. We must believe it rather than give up our moral conception. God Almighty, maker of all things and ruler of all men, came down from heaven in bodily form, and conveyed a message of unspeakable moment. He gave it only to a few, but he is always partial. The message said that God would punish the good for the crimes of the wicked. That is not surprising, for it is a matter of everyday experience: if I get drunk, my son has the gout. The message confirms our darkest forebodings of the future; otherwise, could it be in analogy with our observations? God, then, has said, Let there

be light, and there is no light--no light, or rather darkness visible, such as 'serves only to discover sounds of woe.' Well, if nature is a riddle, how should the message of the God of nature be clear?

27. This is hardly a caricature of Butler's arguments, though it is an interpretation of them into a different dialect. And if they have—as is undeniable—a revolting side, they are also imposing by the sheer tenacity with which, in spite of perplexity and confusion, Butler clings to the one great dogma, that God hates sin. However differently stated in systems of more philosophical width, the conviction must always survive, and Butler's firm grasp of it gives a kind of sublimity to his troubled utterance. Moreover, it enables him to give due weight to the facts overlooked by his opponents. As against Deism, the force of Butler's argument is undeniable. Nature has its dark side. It is not that amiable power which fluent metaphysicians constructed out of *a priori* guesses. Their creed in the long run turned out to be mere moonshine. His is, at least, an impressive statement of certain truths, though they are seen in a distorted form through the traditional haze. No religion can be powerful which does not give forcible expression to men's conviction of the prevalence of natural and moral evil, and of their intimate connection. The shallow optimism of the deists blinked the obvious facts. Butler recognised them manfully, in spite of the additional horrors of the nightmares which haunted his imagination. There is such a thing as evil in the world, he seems to say, and the worst of evils is vice. The philosophy might be improved; but the very want of a philosophy makes his vigorous grasp of such truths the more impressive. Butler's influence is thus an indirect testimony to the fact that no vigorous creed can be reconciled with a tacit denial of the evils which disturb the world and perplex the intellect.

28. Butler has been compared to Pascal. Infinitely inferior in beauty of style, and greatly inferior in logical clearness and width of view, as Butler is to Pascal, there is a certain resemblance. Butler and Pascal are both sensible, as the noblest minds are alone sensible, to the sad discords of the universe. To both of them it seemed to be a scene of blind misery and confusion. Pascal, in despair, pronounces

man's intellect to be helpless, and does his best to prostrate himself before an earthly idol. Butler, trained in a manlier school, refused to commit intellectual suicide. Reason, he says, is feeble; he disdains to conceal how feeble; and yet he resolves painfully and hesitatingly to grope out a path by this feeble guidance. He is as far from joyful confidence as from blank despair. He staggers out of Doubting Castle with trembling knees and wearied limbs. He puzzles out his track by such guidance as he can find, and that guidance is in substance that, whatever fails, a man must try to do his duty. That belief, if nothing else, is of heavenly origin. So doubting a pilgrim could hardly guide others authoritatively; he is no Greatheart, nor has his voice the true spirit-stirring ring of a born leader of men. Christian advocates praise him, declare his arguments to be irrefragable, and find an easier path for themselves. We can but honour him as an honest and brave man—honest enough to admit the existence of doubts, and brave enough not to be paralysed by their existence.

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## DATES.

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| 1692. | Joseph Butler, born at Wantage, Berkshire. |
| | Goes to a dissenting academy in Tewkesbury. |
| Nov. 4, 1713. | Begins correspondence with Clarke. |
| March 17, 1714. | Admitted at Oriel College, Oxford. |
| 1718. | Preacher at the Rolls. |
| 1722. | Rector of Houghton. |
| 1725. | Rector of Stanhope—'not dead but buried.' |
| 1726. | Publishes fifteen sermons preached at the Rolls Chapel. |
| 1733. | Chaplain to Lord Chancellor Talbot; LL.D. at Oxford. |
| 1736. | Clerk of the Closet to Queen Caroline. |
| | Publishes the 'Analogy.' |
| 1738. | Bishop of Bristol. |
| 1740. | Dean of St. Paul's; resigns Stanhope. |
| 1746. | Clerk of the Closet to George II. |
| 1750. | Bishop of Durham. |
| 1751. | Charge on 'External Religion.' |
| June 16, 1752. | Dies. |
| | References to Butler's Works, Oxford, 1835. |

## CHAPTER VI.

### DAVID HUME.

1. 'I FLATTER myself,' says Hume, in the Essay upon Miracles, 'that I have discovered an argument of a like nature' (the reference is to Tillotson's argument on transubstantiation), 'which, if just, will, with the wise and learned, be an everlasting check to all kinds of superstitious delusion, and, consequently, will be useful as long as the world endures.'[1] This preliminary trumpet-flourish, intended probably to startle the drowsy champions of the faith into some consciousness of the philosopher's claims, has been as nearly fulfilled as could have been expected. Hume's argument, neglected for the moment, soon attracted the assaults of theologians.[2] Since his day eager apologists have denounced it, reasoned against it, passed it under the most rigid examination, and loudly and frequently proclaimed the discovery of some fatal flaw. The fact that the argument is being answered to this day proves that its efficacy is not exhausted. Every new assault is a tacit admission that previous assaults have not demolished the hostile works. It is needless to enquire how far this particular logical *crux* has contributed to the decay amongst rational thinkers of a belief in the miraculous. That belief forms part of a system of thought, and grows faint as the general system loses its hold upon the intellect. The pro-

[1] Hume's Works, iv. 89.

[2] The first reference to Hume's Essay which I have noticed is in Skelton's 'Ophiomachia, or Deism Revealed,' vol. ii. 20, &c., London, 1749. It is said that the bookseller was determined to publish this treatise by the advice of Hume, who accidentally saw it in MS. at the bookseller's shop. See Chalmers's 'Biog. Dictionary.' Hume passed most of the year 1748 in London, and his Essays were published by the same bookseller, Millar. The first answer, according to Mr. Burton, was Adams's Essay, in 1751. See Burton's 'Life of Hume,' i. 285.

minence given to the essay, except as an admirable specimen of the dialectical art, may, therefore, be easily exaggerated. No single essay has sapped the bases of belief. On the other hand, the essay is but a small part of Hume's attack upon the fundamental dogmas of theology. His popular reputation, indeed, is almost exclusively based upon it; he is known as the author of this particular dilemma; all else that he wrote is ignored; and so exclusively has attention been fixed upon these particular pages, that few of his assailants take any notice even of the immediately succeeding essay,[1] which forms with it a complete and connected argument.

2. Various causes may be given for this neglect. Hume does not himself give any intimation that the Essay on Miracles requires (if, indeed, it does strictly require) any supplement. The essay gives a direct and tangible issue for the popular disputant. A tricky or illogical, though not consciously unfair, antagonist might feel that the argument was more manageable when detached from its setting, or might be unable to appreciate the wider philosophical considerations; or, possibly, might not have taken the trouble to read any farther in so scandalous a performance. But it is also true that there exists a kind of tacit consent to pass by the questions raised by Hume's other writings upon theology. We dare not face them. Our cowardice and our better feelings shrink from the possibilities of a negative reply. Our belief may be too faint to allow of a keen interest in the discussion, or we have too much at stake, and are appalled by what appears to be a complete disintegration of the universe. The doubts which may chill our hearts are forbidden to pass our lips. Argue this or that theological dogma, if you please; even dispute the value of Christianity as compared with pure theism; but do not ask the tremendous questions which lie beyond—Is there a God? or, rather, have we any means of knowing whether there be a God or not? What, again, do we mean by God in any case? Is the holiest of names but a periphrasis for our ignorance, or a name for some reality, apprehensible, however dimly, by human intelligence? Many men, we cannot doubt, have agreed with Hume's answer, though few have dared to confess their agreement publicly; but that kind of intel-

[1] That on 'A Particular Providence and a Future State.'

lectual courage which faces such doubts in the ordinary spirit of scientific enquiry is only less rare than the courage which will proclaim to the world that they are insoluble. Our literature swarms with so-called demonstrations of the existence of God. The half-formed suspicion of their authors that the foundation of their reasonings may be unsound is rarely indicated by frank admissions, though betrayed in the dexterity with which they sidle past the ancient pitfalls, and the obstinacy with which they deny, not the validity, but even the existence, of objections. Hume's reasonings were, until very recent times, the single example in our literature of a passionless and searching examination of the great problem.

3. The vigour of his mind is exhibited in these writings even more conspicuously than in his metaphysical arguments. His scepticism in metaphysics seems at times to be but half sincere, as scepticism must be which not only disputes certain dogmas, but throws doubt upon the validity of the reasoning process itself. The so called scepticism of the theological essays is not in this sense sceptical; it admits the validity of reason in its own sphere, but seeks to demonstrate that theology lies outside of that sphere. In the metaphysical writings Hume throws doubts upon the validity of our belief in the invariable order of the universe. His theological writings are made more cogent by admitting that fundamental truth. The doubts which he expounds are not the mere playthings of philosophical fancy, which vanish when we leave the closet for the street. They are strong convictions seen from another side; and are as dogmatic, in one sense, as the theologian's in the opposite sense. From his various writings, the 'Treatise on Human Nature,' the 'Dialogues on Natural Religion,' the 'Philosophical Essays,' and the 'Natural History of Religion,' we may frame a complete and logically co-ordinated system of argument. Mr. Mill, the most distinguished of Hume's recent disciples, left behind him an essay upon theism, discussing the same vital problems with the advantage afforded by familiarity with subsequent speculation. Though more symmetrically arranged, it scarcely includes a single argument not explicitly stated or clearly indicated by Hume. It is marked, however, by one quality, curiously absent from Hume's colourless logic. A pathetic desire to find some remnant of truth in the ancient

dogmas breathes throughout its pages, and is allowed to exercise a distorting influence upon its conclusions. In Hume there is no trace of such a sentiment. As a rule, he neither scoffs, nor sneers, nor regrets. The dogma under discussion seems neither to attract nor to repel him. Here and there we may trace too complacent a sense of his ingenuity, or a desire to administer a passing rebuff to the confidence of men like Warburton; but the stream of his logic is generally as unruffled and limpid as though he were discussing a metaphysical puzzle unrelated to human passion, or undertaking an historical enquiry into the truth of some doubtful legend. This strange calmness is characteristic of the man and of his age; it is only possible to a consummate logician, arguing at a time when theology, though living amongst the masses, was being handed over by thinkers to the schools. We have in his pages the ultimate expression of the acutest scepticism of the eighteenth century; the one articulate statement of a philosophical judgment upon the central questions at issue.

4. Let us endeavour to state Hume's reasonings as calmly as they were propounded. What are the appropriate methods of proof? Kant, in the 'Critique of Pure Reason,' resolves all possible methods into the ontological, that of which Descartes' argument is the fullest expression; the cosmological, or the familiar argument from the necessity of a first cause; and the physico-theological, or the argument based upon the evidences of design. According to Kant, the last two arguments are ultimately resolvable into the first; and the first is, according to him, untenable. The pure reason cannot supply a basis for theology; a function which, however, is discharged by the practical reason. Kant's reasonings are stated with much greater scholastic precision than Hume's, and imply a more systematic conception of the relations of theology and philosophy; but they scarcely show greater acuteness, and they do not show an equally unbiassed attitude of mind. His scheme may enable us to condense Hume's arguments, dispersed through various essays, into a definite system of reasoning.

5. The belief in God may be regarded as an ultimate truth, above all need of demonstration. We know the existence of God, as we know our own existence, by direct

intuition. This doctrine may take the mystical shape, or the common-sense shape, or it may appear as the ontological argument. The mystic is outside of argument. The vague yearning which sees no personal deity, and requires no logical apparatus of articulate demonstration, but recognises the divinity immanent in all nature through some supersensual faculty, was beyond Hume's cognisance. The doctrine partakes more of the character of emotion than reason, and the mere logician is powerless either to assail or support it. As represented by the common-sense philosopher, who says dogmatically that a belief in God is a first principle, the doctrine is equally unassailable by argument. The believer must, in fact, say to the atheist, 'You lie,' or he must say, 'I have a faculty which you have not.' Locke put the dilemma in his controversy with Stillingfleet. The argument from universal consent, he says, which is the historical form of the same theory, must be useless; 'for, if anyone deny a God, such a perfect universality of consent is destroyed; and, if nobody does deny a God, what need of arguments to convince atheists?'[1] All serious argument implies the possibility of sincere dissent. Against an opponent of theism who is not really an atheist, we require not argument, but exhortations to truthfulness. If the believer claims a special faculty, the question arises, whose faculty is the most trustworthy; and the argument passes into some other form. Hume regarded all mystics as foolish 'enthusiasts,' represented at the time of writing only by such solitary recluses as Law, or by fanatical followers of Wesley. He would have thought it a mere waste of time to direct his batteries against them; and the common-sense philosophers did little more than give him the lie direct.

6. His whole philosophy, however, is the antithesis of the doctrine upon which reposed the ontological proof of Descartes, or the more familiar cosmological proof represented by Clarke. His scepticism is one continuous assault upon the validity of their methods; and the direct application is made, though with some veil of reticence, in the fourth part of the 'Treatise of Human Nature,' and more explicitly in the posthumous 'Dialogues on Natural Religion.' Abandoning the high *a priori* road, divines might betake them-

[1] Locke's Works, iii. 495.

selves to the 'physico-theological' argument, generally described as the argument from final causes. A prolonged and most ingenious discussion of this theory forms the main substance of the Dialogues. Reasoners, again, who doubted the soundness of this mode of argument, or shrank from raising the fundamental questions involved, might retire to the moral argument, which, in one shape or other, has the strongest influence with many minds. The theory of the 'categorical imperative,' and the deduction of theology as a regulative principle of conduct, was not known to English thinkers, but it has a close affinity to the ethical doctrine of Clarke, and is represented to some extent in Butler's doctrine of the conscience. Hume's morality, if accepted, strikes at the root of this theory; and the application to Butler's argument is sufficiently indicated in the essay upon 'A Particular Providence and a Future State.' Finally, abandoning all strictly philosophical arguments, the divine might fall back upon the historical argument. He might appeal to experience at large, as showing that the idea of a supreme Deity must have been supernaturally implanted in men's minds, or to the particular experience embodied in the history of revelation. The answers to these arguments are given by Hume in the 'Natural History of Religion,' and in that Essay on Miracles, which alone excited any vehemence of controversy.

7. The whole cycle of reasoning is thus completed. Later developments of thought have presented some of the arguments assailed by Hume in a form intended to evade the destructive effects of his criticism. Whether that intention has or has not been successfully carried out is a question beyond my province. It is enough to say for the present that, whatever the value of Hume's reasonings, he has, at least, the high merit of having unflinchingly enquired into the profoundest of all questions, and of having dared to give the result of his enquiries without fear or favour. The want of intellectual courage displayed by his contemporaries is doubtless pardonable, in one sense. We cannot judge harshly of men who feared to injure a doctrine which, true or false, seemed to afford the only lasting consolation to suffering humanity, and the only sound basis for morality. But, in

another sense, no cowardice is ever pardonable, for it is never pardoned by facts. Want of candour brings an inevitable penalty upon the race, if not upon the individual. The hollowness in theory and the impotence in practice of English speculation in the last half of the century, is but the natural consequence of the faint-heartedness which prevented English thinkers from looking facts in the face. The huge development of hypocrisy, of sham beliefs, and indolent scepticism, is the penalty which we have had to pay for our not daring to meet the doubts openly expressed by Hume, and by Hume alone.

8. Hume's scepticism cuts away the very base of ontological proof. The mind, according to him, is unable to rise one step beyond sensible experience. It can separate and combine the various 'impressions' and 'ideas;' it is utterly unable to create a single new idea, or penetrate to an ultimate world of realities. The 'substance' in which the qualities of the phenomenal world are thought to inhere is a concept emptied of all contents, and a word without a meaning. The external world, which supports the phenomena, is but a 'fiction' of the mind; the mind, which in the same way affords a substratum for the impressions, is itself a fiction; and the divine substance, which, according to the Cartesians, causes the correlation between these two fictions, must—that is the natural inference—be equally a fiction. Impressions and ideas, combining and separating in infinite variety, being the sole realities; the bond which unites, and the substratum which supports them, must be essentially unknowable, for knowledge itself is but an association of ideas. Dismiss these doubts, attempt to frame ontological propositions, and the fallacy manifests itself afresh in the futility of the dogma which emerges. Under the form of examining Bayle's criticism upon the 'hideous hypothesis' of Spinoza[1] Hume exhibits the inevitable antinomies, which beset the reason in its endeavour to soar beyond experience, and, therefore, on his assumption, to transcend itself.[2] Metaphysicians had insisted upon the utterly disparate character of mind and matter. The two could not be brought into relation, except by the verbal explanation of the divine power. It was only neces-

[1] 'Treatise,' i. 524.

[2] Ib. part iv. sec. v.

sary, then, to exhibit this antithesis, to show that the doctrine was inconceivable. Mind cannot be resolved into matter, therefore materialism is absurd. But neither can mind be brought into contact with matter, unless mind be itself extended. Therefore spiritualism is equally absurd.[1] The external universe, said Bayle, in answer to Spinoza, in all its complex variety, cannot be a simple undivisible substance. Neither, then, can the soul, whose ideas, by the hypothesis, reflect every conceivable modification of the external universe, be a simple indivisible substance.[2] Whatever may be said of the assumed object, may be said of the impression by which it is represented. Matter and motion, it was argued again, however varied, could still be nothing but motion and matter. Hume's theory of causation destroys the argument. Causes and effects are but names for conjoined phenomena, and we cannot assert *à priori* that any two phenomena will or not be conjoined. No position of bodies can produce motion, any more than it can produce thought; for, turn it which way you will, it is still but a position of bodies.[3] As thought and motion are, in fact, constantly united, motion may be, and on Hume's definition it actually is, the cause of thought. We must either assert that causal connection between two objects exists only where we can perceive the logical nexus between their ideas, or we must admit that uniform conjunction implies a causal relation. In the first case, there can be no 'cause or productive principle' in the universe, not even the Deity himself. For we have no 'idea' of the Deity, except from impressions, each of which appears to be an independent entity, and, therefore, includes no efficacy. If we still assert the Deity to be the one cause which supplies this defect, he must be the cause of every action, virtuous or vicious; and we fall into Pantheism. If we admit that uniform connection is sufficient to establish cause, we must then admit that anything may be the cause of anything;[3] and the argument against Materialism vanishes. Nominally retorting upon Bayle the objections to Spinozism, Hume is really extending Bayle's scepticism beyond its immediate purpose; and bringing out the contradictions which inevitably beset the attempt to treat of absolute substances supposed to exist in perfect

[1] 'Treatise,' i. 523. [2] Ib. pp. 526, 527. [3] Ib. p. 530.

simplicity and independence of all relations. His argument was blunted by a thin veil of reticence, and the defects of style which mar the early treatise: and it dealt with considerations too abstract to impress the ordinary reasoner. In the posthumous Dialogues he comes to closer quarters with the popular theology.

9. The Dialogues are prefaced by an apology for adopting that form of argument. The true motives are obvious enough. Theologians might indulge in demonstrations. The sceptic finds it convenient to create personages to whose utterances he is not obviously pledged. Moreover, the form of the Dialogue itself implies an argument. The sceptic Philo mediates between the rigidly orthodox Demea and the more amenable Cleanthes. Demea and Cleanthes represent, in fact, two opposite schools of theology, and Philo finds in each of them an ally in his assault upon the other. We have already noticed the antithesis between Clarke and Waterland, or between Browne and Berkeley. When each divine accused his brother of sanctioning the first principles of Atheism, so keen an observer as Hume was not likely to overlook the advantage to himself. He could stand aside, like Faulconbridge in 'King John,' and watch France and Austria shoot in each other's faces. Demea, in fact, represents the *a priori* school, who at once assert the existence of God and exhaust themselves in assertions of the utter inconceivability of his attributes. Cleanthes, relying upon the argument from final causes, is forced to admit a certain analogy between the Divine workman whose purpose is revealed in his work, and the human observer who can understand his designs. The agreement of theologians is an agreement to use a common name, but the name covers radically inconsistent conceptions. The arguments of the anthropomorphist for a limited Deity tell against the ontological argument for an infinite Deity. The worship of nature can be no more made to square with the worship of Jehovah than with the worship of the supreme artisan. Hume is least antipathetic to the least exalted conception. He has a common ground with the reasoner from design, and resents the metaphysical arrogance which at once admits that its dogmas are unintelligible, and insists upon

their acceptance. There is hope of a definite issue between ourselves and a reasoner who accepts our method. Between the *a priori* school and Hume's the opposition was vital, though in practice the ontologists might frame a theology of a more neutral tint than that of their rivals.

10. In the Dialogues, Hume deals briefly with the *a priori* argument. Assuming the truth of his philosophy, it falls, as we have seen, to the ground. He states, however, distinctly the main ground of the difficulties to which it is exposed. Admitting ostensibly the necessity of a belief in God, he quotes Malebranche, and adds that he might have quoted any number of philosophical divines [1] in favour of the utter inconceivability of the divine nature. We call him a spirit to signify that he is not matter; but without venturing to imply that his nature has any resemblance to ours. We attribute to him thought, design, knowledge; but such words are used in a sense indefinitely distant from that which they bear when applied to mankind. Cleanthes, the advocate of final causes, asks Demea—the representative of the *a priori* theorists—how this doctrine differs from that of the sceptics or atheists, who declare the first cause to be unknown and unintelligible? [2] Men, he says, who assert that God can have no attributes corresponding to human ideas, that he is absolutely simple and immutable, are in fact atheists without knowing it. 'A mind whose acts and sentiments and ideas are not distinct and successive; one that is wholly simple and totally immutable, is a mind which has no thought, no reason, no will, no sentiment, no love, no hatred; or, in a word, is no mind at all.' [3] The ontologists may prove the existence of God; but God with them means pure Being—a blank, colourless, and useless conception.

11. But can it be proved? Hume lays down as a principle that it is evidently absurd to demonstrate a matter of fact, or to prove it by any arguments *a priori*.[4] 'Nothing is demonstrable, unless the contrary implies a contradiction. Nothing that is distinctly conceivable implies a contradiction. Whatever we conceive as existent, we can also conceive as non-existent. There is no being, therefore, whose non-existence implies a contradiction. Consequently, there is no being

[1] 'Dialogues,' ii. 390. [2] Ib. ii. 405. [3] Ib. ii. 407. [4] Ib. ii. 432.

whose existence is demonstrable. I propose this argument as entirely decisive, and am willing to rest the whole controversy upon it.'[1] This, in fact, is Hume's retort to the ontological argument of Descartes. It anticipates the more elaborate analysis of the same argument by Kant; and though it may need development, seems to be substantially unanswerable. Reid characteristically admits its validity in regard to all truths concerning existence, excepting 'only the existence and attributes of the Supreme Being, which is the only necessary truth we know regarding existence.'[2] It is impossible, however, to assign a clear logical ground for this judicious exception. The Cartesian proof is really a subtle mode of begging the question. It is contradictory to speak of non-existing existence; and, therefore, if God be defined as the existing Being, his existence is, of course, necessary. But to transmute this logical necessity into an objective necessity is a mere juggle. It proves that God exists, *if* he exists; which is indeed a true, but not a fruitful, proposition. The argument, in fact, proves nothing, or simply asserts the apparently identical proposition that all existence exists. Every being which exists is known as related to and limited by other existences. From our experience of a particular existence, we may advance by help of such relations to other existences, beyond our immediate experience. But an existence, proved by *a priori* argument, and therefore independent of all relations to the facts of experience, can be nothing but the totality of all existence. The conclusion must be as wide as the premisses. From an argument, independent of all experience, we must infer an existence which does not affect experience, or which affects all experience equally. It has been attempted to revive the ontological argument thus assailed by Hume and Kant; but their criticism is at least decisive against its original form.

12. The 'cosmological' argument attempts to amend this plea by introducing a datum from experience. Something, it is admitted, exists; therefore, there is a necessary existence. Hume scarcely distinguishes this from the ontological argument with which, as Kant says, it is ultimately identical. In a short passage, however, he touches the vital point.

[1] 'Dialogues,' ii. 432.

[2] Reid, p. 430.

Clarke had argued that matter could not be the self-existent Being, because any particle of matter might be conceived to be annihilated or altered. But it is equally possible, as Hume rejoins, to imagine the Deity to be non-existent, or his attributes to be altered. If that be impossible in fact, it is impossible in virtue of some unknown and inconceivable attributes, which may, therefore, be capable of union with matter. Or, if we put the argument into the more familiar form of the 'first cause,' we are falling into another fallacy. To ask for the cause of an eternal succession is absurd, for cause implies priority of time. In the everlasting chain each link is caused by the preceding, and causes the succeeding. But the whole requires a cause? To call it a whole is an act of the mind which implies no difference in the nature of things. If I could show the cause of each individual in a collection of twenty particles, it would be absurd to ask for the cause of the whole twenty. That is given in giving the particular causes.[1] Hume sees, in fact, that the conception of causality which compels us to bind together all beings as mutually conditioned by each other, cannot, without a logical trick, be transferred to the totality of being. If applicable at all, it would produce an infinite series; for, having determined the cause of the whole, we should have to ask for the cause of the cause. The application of the principle is in its very nature incapable of ever leading to an ultimate conclusion. It suggests only an infinite progression, reminding us once more of Locke's famous illustration of the Indian philosopher and his world-supporting elephant.[2]

13. Hume suggests this last difficulty in answer to the physico-theological disputant, whose argument, as we shall see, slides into the other. He concludes his brief argument against the *a priori* philosopher by the undeniable remark that such reasoning has never had much practical influence upon any minds except those of metaphysicians attempting to transplant the mathematical argument into an inappropriate sphere.[3] The argument from final causes, on the other hand, is the most popular pretext for belief, even where it has not been the efficient cause of belief. 'He that made the eye shall he not see?' has been from of old the most effective

[1] 'Dialogues,' ii. 433. [2] Ib. ii. 408. [3] Ib. ii. 434.

retort upon the unbeliever. To deprive this argument of its authority, says Kant, is a hopeless task, though he denies it to be demonstrative; and Hume himself admits that (in the character of Philo) he needs all his 'sceptical and metaphysical subtlety' to elude the grasp of the believer.[1] And yet it is plain that this celebrated argument involves another form of the same difficulty. The first steps of the reasoning are enticingly plain and simple; but when we would reach the conclusion, we suddenly find a huge gulf yawning across our path. Remain in generalities: argue that the general order implies some vaster intelligence, underlying the whole universe, and the argument seems to be satisfactory, as, indeed, Hume seems to admit in some sense at the end of the treatise. He concludes, and apparently with sincerity, that we may admit as the final outcome of natural theology this 'simple, though somewhat ambiguous, at least undefined proposition; that the cause or causes of order in the universe probably have some remote analogy to human intelligence.'[2] But try to press the argument home, to grasp it in a tenable definite shape, and it crumbles in our hands. We can see it when we do not look at it directly. It affords a basis for a vague surmise, not for a distinct dogmatic belief.

14. Hume's argument is a little disordered by the exigencies of the Dialogue; and, perhaps, by his preference of literary effect to scholastic perfection of system. It may, however, be easily reduced to logical coherence. The real difficulty, as Hume very clearly sees, is that the argument, if valid, is in favour of some anthropomorphic conclusion; and that it loses its validity in proportion as it gains in dignity. This is the objection which Demea and Philo, the orthodox and the sceptic, concur in pressing upon Cleanthes, the upholder of its validity. You do not prove, they urge, the existence of God, but of a god or gods—a Demiurgus, not a Supreme Being. The objection may be evaded in two ways: we may either assert that the inference from the part to the whole is legitimate, in which case the argument melts into the *a priori* or ontological argument; or we may be content with proving the existence of a God, considered as a part of the universe,

[1] 'Dialogues,' ii. 443. [2] Ib. ii. 467.

and leave the subsequent transition to be tacitly effected. We have to choose between reaching a sufficiently wide conclusion and having a forcible argument. Thus, we may say a watch implies a maker, a house an architect, a book an author, and, therefore, the universe at large must have a contriver. Or, we may say, since the watch implies a maker, the eye equally implies a maker; and, from the numerous cases of a similar character, we gain a cumulative proof for the existence of a being who has put together a number of natural contrivances, as men have put together their artificial contrivances. The distinction is not precisely made by Hume in this form, and some of his arguments may be applied to either hypothesis; but, by taking it into account, we shall be able to appreciate the argument more clearly without any real alteration of Hume's meaning.

15. The argument, as originally stated by Cleanthes, is that the world is 'nothing but one great machine, subdivided into an infinite number of lesser machines, which again admit of subdivisions, to a degree beyond what human senses can trace and explain.'[1] The adaptation of means to ends is throughout similar; and we are, therefore, justified in inferring the existence of a supreme contriver, with faculties in some sense resembling, though infinitely superior to, our own. The sceptic urges that analogy must grow weaker as the cases diverge, and that the supposed resemblance between a house and the universe is obviously too faint to justify more than a guess or conjecture.[2] Thought is but one of the forces which are operative throughout the universe; heat and cold, attraction and repulsion, are equally active causes. We are not justified in the wide jump from a minute part to the whole. Even assuming that we may argue from the *operations* of one part of nature upon another to the *origin* of the whole (which never can be admitted), yet why select so minute, so weak, so bounded a principle, as the reason of animals is found to be upon this planet? What peculiar privilege has this little agitation of the brain, which we call thought, that we must thus make it the model of the universe?'[3] There are, he afterwards says, four principles—reason, instinct, generation, vegetation—each of which, or any one of a hundred

[1] 'Dialogues,' ii. 392. [2] Ib. ii. 393. [3] Ib. ii. 396.

others, might be selected for the analogy. 'The world resembles a machine, therefore it is a machine; therefore it rose from design'—that is the final cause argument. Why not say 'The world resembles an animal, therefore it is an animal; therefore it arose from generation?'[1] The steps in the last argument are not wider, and the analogy, says Hume, is more striking than in the first. And thus we have the old doctrine of the *anima mundi* or the ancient mythological fancies of the origin of nature from animal birth. It is, indeed, easy to suggest an escape from such difficulties; but the escape is by changing the argument from design into the ontological argument, and a revival of all the old difficulties. The existence of reason, we must now say, implies the existence of a supreme creative faculty which includes, though it is not to be identified with, reason. We must, then, universalise our terms. The order observable in the universe implies, not the specific faculty of reason, but a divine mind, whose ideas correspond to the visible universe as the architect's plan corresponds to the house. Hume meets us again. Granting this, we have the old set of perplexities. The mental world requires a cause as much as the material world. Thought, as we know it, implies a machinery as curious as matter. Must we find a new cause for this ideal world, and so be led into an infinite progression; or shall we assert the existence of a self-ordering principle in ideas? But ideas may be disorganised as well as matter, and experience can tell us nothing of such an ultimate principle. It is, in fact, nothing better than those occult qualities assumed by the old physiologists, who would say that bread nourished by its nutritive faculty. It is but a 'more learned and elaborate way of expressing our ignorance.' At the end of all discussion we come to the inscrutable. An ideal system arranged without preceding design is no more explicable than a material one.[2]

16. Thus, if the argument be made apparently tenable by extending its terms, we find that we have but explained the universe by assuming a counterpart, itself equally in need of explanation. That, in spite of such reasoning, there remains

[1] 'Dialogues,' ii. 424.

[2] Ib. pp. 408–11.

an ineradicable impression that, in some undefinable sense, some mysterious power, to which reason bears an indefinable analogy, must underlie the visible world, is a doctrine not to be entirely dispelled ; nor, as I have already said, does Hume appear to disavow it. His arguments might be met by the believers in later ontological systems ; though no reasoning can express this shadowy belief in definite logical form, and still less frame from it an available system of theology. We shall presently see Hume's observations upon the gulf which yawns between such a philosophical theism, or, rather, pantheism, and the theism which alone can regulate men's lives, or alter their conceptions of fact.

17. Meanwhile, the popular argument escapes the difficulty by a different path. Man, it says, makes houses ; God must have made the eye. Admit the force of the reasoning, and we are evidently proving the existence of a being, existing in time and space, and operating upon matter external to himself. The cause is proportional to the effect. From a finite effect we can only infer a finite cause ; and from an imperfect effect an imperfect cause. The many difficulties in nature are explicable, as an illusion produced by the limitation of our faculties if *a priori* reasoning has established the existence of a perfect creator ; but when made the groundwork of an argument, they must imply that the creator has been at fault ; or, at lowest, that we cannot tell whether he has or has not been at fault.[1] Not only does the argument go to prove a creator finite in power and imperfect in skill, but it does not even tend to prove his unity. If a city implies many men, why should not the universe imply many deities or demons ?[2] The vaster we suppose the power, the less close the analogy. Polytheism, in short, with all its accompaniments of the grossest anthropomorphism, is the most natural, though not the necessary, inference from the argument, for the closer the resemblance discovered, the closer the likeness of the unknown cause to man.[3]

18. An objection is made by Cleanthes, which, indeed, forms a natural part of the argument from final causes. He argues from the brief course of modern history that the world must have had an origin in time ; and, if an origin,

[1] 'Dialogues,' ii. 412. [2] Ib. ii. 413. [3] Ib. ii. 414.

then a maker. The sceptic replies that the argument suggests the probability of convulsions sufficient to have swept away the traces of former civilisations ; and that, in fact, we have geological proofs throughout the world that every part of it has been covered with water. The most consistent explanation, then, is to suppose incessant and continuous change. An 'eternal inherent principle of order,' with 'great and continual revolutions and alterations,' will solve all difficulties as well as any other theory ; and thus the argument is equally favourable to scepticism, polytheism, or theism.[1] Another cosmogony is suggested which forms a kind of link between the 'old epicurean hypotheses' and modern systems of evolution. We may regard order as the condition of the continuous existence of a given state, not as its creative principle. 'Unguided matter' going through eternal revolutions will at times fall, so to speak, into positions of stable equilibrium. One of them when once reached will necessarily have a comparative permanence. Upon this hypothesis, it is vain to insist upon the uses of the parts in animals or vegetables, and their curious adjustment to each other. 'I would fain know how an animal could subsist unless its parts were so adjusted?'[2] The doctrine of final causes is here met by that doctrine of the survival of the fittest, or the correspondence between the organism and its medium, which in recent times has been its most fatal antagonist.

19. The argument thus appears to be unmanageable. It concludes, if it concludes for anything, for a finite and imperfect creator ; and, if for a finite creator, then for any number of creators, or for the absence of any distinct creator. We are no longer seeking for the sole and supreme cause, but endeavouring to account for a set of adaptations, effected by some unknown agent acting under strict conditions and at some particular point. We have almost substituted an antiquarian investigation for a philosophical discussion. One mythology will serve for such a purpose as well as another. We admire a ship which has really been the gradual product of a system struck out by much botching and bungling ; the world may have been made after the same fashion, or have been constructed by an infantile or superannuated or in-

[1] 'Dialogues,' ii. 419-20. [2] Ib. ii. 428.

capable deity.[1] In such arguments, says Hume, where we are guided by a finite analogy, it would be easy to suggest any number of systems, though the odds would be indefinitely great against right conjecture.[2]

20. The ambiguity of the argument is not its only defect. The theory, when pushed home, seems to contradict the very experience to which it appeals. In our experience, ideas are always copied from external objects, and mind is capable of affecting only that matter with which it is so conjoined that there is a reciprocal influence between them. The theory reverses these and similar relations.[3] Hume, as we have seen, argues in various shapes, that, if we appeal to experience, generation, and not conscious construction, will be the mode in which complex organisms arise. By what right do we change our ground? What is the logic when articulately exhibited? The argument from experience in all ordinary cases is, upon Hume's theory, that the constant conjunction of two species generates the custom of inferring one from the other. This, and this alone, warrants me in attributing human works to intelligent action. But how can I be justified in making a similar inference in regard to objects 'single, individual, without parallel or specific resemblance?'[4] To afford grounds for the necessary indication, we ought to have had experience of the rise of several worlds. To ascertain that ours must have arisen from a thought and art resembling the human is simply ridiculous. The universe, as he puts it elsewhere,[5] is a unique effect. Our methods of investigation leave us helpless before such problems.

21. The more closely we scrutinise this imposing argument, the less we can trust it. It proves too much or too little. It lands us in downright anthropomorphism, or it leaves us with nothing but a vague doctrine. We may admit that the reasoning is compatible with the orthodox theory, we cannot hold that it proves it. And yet, if we admitted its value, we should be in face of a still more tremendous difficulty.

[1] 'Dialogues,' ii. 413-4. See the illustration of the ship worked out very ingeniously by Mandeville, though for a different purpose ('Fable of the Bees,' pt. ii. dial. 3).

[2] Ib. ii. 426. [3] Ib. ii. 430. [4] Ib. ii. 398.

[5] Essays, iv. 121 ('Essay on a Particular Providence').

Establish the existence of a first cause or a contriver, by appeals to reason or to experience, and we have still to ask whether we can discover a supreme moral ruler. Whether the world may have been made in this way or that is comparatively a question of curiosity. Whether it is governed by a ruler armed with the power and the will to secure our happiness is the real question. It is the consciousness of man's imbecility and weakness, says the orthodox Demea, that causes him to search for an all-powerful protector. That sentiment is the source, and strives to be the guarantee, of the religious instinct. The sceptic joins with Demea to enforce the old text of human misery; and Cleanthes struggles feebly to uphold the optimist view. Yet, granting all that he asserts, the sceptic urges unanswerably that a doubtful balance of happiness over misery is not what we should expect from infinite power, infinite wisdom, and infinite goodness. 'Why is there any misery at all in this world? Not by chance surely. From some cause then. Is it from the intention of the Deity? But he is perfectly benevolent. Is it contrary to his intention? But he is almighty.' Here, indeed, is the hopeless dilemma to which no answer can ever be suggested. 'Nothing,' as the sceptic Philo says, 'can shake the solidity of this reasoning, so short, so clear, so decisive; except we assert that these subjects exceed all human capacity, and that our common measures of truth and falsehood are not applicable to them'—a doctrine which the anthropomorphist Cleanthes has all along denied.[1] Here, says Philo, 'I find myself at ease in my argument.' In discussing the natural attributes, he felt that he was struggling against the obvious probabilities; but he adds: 'It is now your turn to tug the labouring oar, and to support your philosophical subtleties against the dictates of plain reason and experience.'[2]

22. Cleanthes replies by an anticipation of the theory which seems to have commended itself to Mr. Mill; he reverts to the doctrine of a limited deity already suggested as the logical result of the argument from design; and thinks that 'benevolence, regulated by wisdom and limited by necessity, may produce just such a world as the present.'[2]

[1] 'Dialogues,' ii. 443. [2] Ib. ii. 444.

Philo replies by a more elaborate statement of his argument. Admitting, as before, that the facts are not incompatible with the orthodox theory, he denies that they have any tendency of themselves to suggest it. The misery of life may be attributed in great measure to four causes, all of which, so far as our limited powers entitle us to speak, might be removed.[1] The first, is the employment of pain as well as pleasure to excite to action; the second, the fact that the world is conducted by general and inflexible laws, which could not, it is true, be abrogated without palpable inconvenience, but which might be suspended often enough to extirpate evil, or, at any rate, directed without interfering with our powers of prevision. A touch to Caligula's brain in his infancy might have made him into a Trajan, and human foresight would have been no more perplexed than by the apparent accidents of storm or sickness.[2] Thirdly, it seems as though natural powers had been so frugally doled out as just to preserve existence. There is no such superfluous stock of endowments as might have been provided by an indulgent parent. But a little more industry, and the vast mass of evil which arises from idleness would be abolished. And, fourthly, the 'inaccurate workmanship' of all parts of the great machine is constantly producing evils. Storms arise in the moral and in the physical universe, and the secretions of the frame are constantly in excess or defect. There *may* be good reasons for these causes of evil, but what they may be, and whether they exist, is altogether beyond our knowledge; and thus, though we may save, we cannot establish, the orthodox conclusion as to the divine attributes.

23. The universe, in short, suggests to us a 'blind nature, impregnated by a great vivifying principle, and pouring forth from her lap, without discernment or parental care, her maimed and abortive children.'[3] Shall we adopt the Manichean principle as the best explanation of this strange mixture of good and ill? It is specious, and in some respects more

[1] 'Dialogues,' ii. 446.

[2] This is certainly a curious argument from the opponent of miracles. If such miracles could happen without our knowledge, how do we know they have not happened? Perhaps this may suggest a new mode of assailing Hume to his orthodox antagonists; but the argument would require delicate handling.

[3] Ib. ii. 446-452.

probable than the common hypothesis, but scarcely compatible with the general uniformity. Cold and heat, moisture and drought, alternate in nature ; but the alternation suggests rather indifference than conflict. Of four hypotheses in regard to the causes of the universe—that they are perfectly good, or perfectly bad, or good and bad in conflict, or indifferent—the two simple hypotheses are condemned by the mixture of phenomena ; the hypothesis of conflict is condemned by their uniformity ; the last hypothesis, therefore, that of indifference, 'seems by far the most probable.' [1]

24. Each man sees the universe coloured by his own temperament ; and to Hume, in his speculative moments, it naturally appeared to be all but colourless. His final conclusion—so far as it can be taken as a serious expression of opinion—is equally characteristic. After all, he says, is it not a dispute about words ? 'The theist allows that the original intelligence is very different from human reason ; the atheist allows that the original principle of order bears some remote analogy to it.' [2] Where is the great difference ? The misfortune is, however, that religion, as we know it, is something very different from that calm assent to a hazy belief, which, on Hume's showing, should supplant our elaborate systems of dogma. The 'Dialogues' conclude with some pregnant remark supon the important truth that the prevailing religions which are supposed to comfort man and restrain his passions, do, in fact, reflect his deepest melancholy and his worst feelings. The ordinary assumption, that beliefs are somehow imposed from without, instead of being generated from within, maintains a very erronous estimate of their influence ; and Hume's brief suggestions, if conceived in too hostile a spirit, go to the root of the matter.

25. Hume, as I have said, expressly takes notice that he does not assert facts to be incompatible with the theological solution, but only that they afford no presumption in its favour. It may be true, so far as we can say, that God is benevolent and omnipotent, or that his power or his benevolence is limited ; any cosmogony, indeed, is compatible with our observations ; to dogmatise in the negative sense is as incompatible with the sceptical view as to dogmatise in the positive

[1] 'Dialogues,' ii. 452. [2] Ib. ii. 459.

sense. The denial of all certainty is, however, equivalent to a denial that theology can have any influence upon our lives. We could not, in any case, allow ourselves to be guided by the bare possibility that our actions may have influences which are, by their very nature, inscrutable. The possible truth of the Christian, or Pagan, or Epicurean solutions is, in the same way, too remote a contingency to be taken into account. Absolute ignorance can never be a ground for action. We cannot confute the Rosicrucian dreams of sylphs and invisible agents; we must act without reference to them. But the admitted possibility leaves room for an argument of a different kind from those hitherto considered. The argument from final causes is an argument from analogy; but analogy had been applied in a different sense by Butler. The Christian theory, he said, in substance, gives a view of the world similar to the view which is suggested by a fair interrogation of experience. If we assume for a moment the truth of the Christian dogma, it will fall in with our independent experience. The two views will coalesce and mutually strengthen each other. And if, as cannot be denied, there is some independent evidence for Christianity, our provisional belief will be transmuted into something like certainty by this process. Introduce but an appreciable fragment of independent evidence, and our previously chaotic knowledge will crystallise round the nucleus. Though we do not profess to obtain a demonstration, our opinions may thus acquire a degree of probability sufficient to prompt us to action. Hume's reply to this theory is given in the essay on 'A Providence and a Future State.'

26. The essay,[1] written in Hume's most admirable style, is, in form, an imaginary defence of Epicurus against the ordinary accusations. Your tenets, say his accusers, are immoral; he replies that the tenets, however interesting to speculatists, have no bearing upon practice. It would be more accurate, of course, to say that their bearing upon society is confined to the destruction of opinions which are demonstrably false. The position taken by his opponents is that assumed by Cleanthes in the Dialogue. From the crea-

[1] It was originally called 'Of the Practical Consequences of Natural Religion'—a title which seems to correspond more accurately to the contents.

tion they infer an intelligent creator; and thence an intelligent government of the world. Hume starts by laying down the principle that the cause must be proportional to the effect. A definition of cause and effect, more accurate than Hume's, would strengthen his case, for we should then consider the effect and cause to be but the same phenomenon contemplated from different points of view. Hume, however, seizes the principle firmly enough, though his statement may be open to cavil. 'A body,' he says, 'of ten ounces raised in a scale may serve as a proof that the counterbalancing weight exceeds ten ounces, but can never afford a reason that it exceeds a hundred.'[1] Rather, we should say, the suspension of the weight proves the weight on the other side to be exactly ten ounces. It may be that the pressure is produced by the piston of a steam-hammer, which, in case of need, could exert a pressure of as many tons. That is merely to assert, that, under existing conditions, the pressure is ten ounces, though, under other conditions, the pressure might be indefinitely increased. 'The same rule,' as Hume continues, 'holds whether the cause assigned be brute unconscious matter, or a rational intelligent being.'[2] From one of Zeuxis' pictures, we may safely infer that he possessed precisely the amount of artistic skill displayed; we cannot infer that he was also an architect or a sculptor. Applying the same principle to the case in point, we must allow that the gods, the supposed cause of the universe, possess the amount of skill and intelligence which appears in their workmanship. We can prove nothing further, unless we supply the defect of reason by flattery. We cannot 'mount up from the universe, the effect, to Jupiter, the cause, and then descend downwards to infer any new effect to that cause. . . The knowledge of the cause being derived solely from the effect, they must be adjusted exactly to each other; and the one can never refer to anything further, or be the foundation of any new inference and conclusion.'[3] Hence, though we may accept the religious hypothesis as accounting for the phenomena, 'no just reasoner will ever presume to infer from it any single fact, and alter or add to the phenomena, in any single particular.'[4] The application to the

[1] Essays, iv. 112.
[2] Ib. iv. 112.
[3] Ib. iv. 113.
[4] Ib. iv. 115.

case of Epicurus is obvious. He is accused of denying a supreme governor who rules the course of events, but he does not and cannot deny the course of events itself. As, then, the governor is only known through the events, every argument which is fairly deducible from the supposed cause is equally deducible from the effect.

27. The reply which would be made by any ordinary reasoner is obvious. From the painting, he would say, I infer that Zeuxis possesses *at least* the amount of skill displayed. He must have so much, he may have more in any degree. I infer, too, that Zeuxis has the qualities which would fit him to be an architect or a sculptor, if applied to that end. This is merely to say that, in different relations, Zeuxis would be a cause of different effects, which is to state a truism, if not to make an identical proposition. But, to avoid all appearance of quibbling, it is plain that my real inference is, that Zeuxis, under the given conditions, can produce precisely such a picture as that which I see: though I may infer that, under other conditions, he would produce better or worse, or entirely different works of art. The ground of this inference can be nothing but my experience of Zeuxis and other members of the species in varying relations. I learn from experience that a man who can do this or that in one case, can do such and such things in another case. As Hume says, when we find 'that any work has proceeded from the skill and industry of man; as we are otherwise acquainted with the nature of the animal, we can draw a hundred inferences concerning what may be expected from him; and those inferences will all be founded in experience and observation.' But did we know man 'only from the single work or production which we examine, it were impossible for us to argue in this manner, because our knowledge of all the qualities which we ascribe to him, being in that case derived from the production, it is impossible they could point to anything further, or be the foundation of any new inference.'[1] Thus a footprint on the sand proves that there was probably another footmark, now obliterated, because we know independently that most men have two feet.'[2] Here we mount from the effect to the cause, and, descending, infer alterations in the effect. But

[1] Essays, iv. 118. [2] Ib. iv. 119.

that is because other experiences enable us to strike into another chain of reasoning. We are not simply ascending and descending the same set of links.

28. The application is clear. The Deity is a single being in the universe; he is not comprehended under any species; he is known by one single effect, and from the very nature of the case, we are excluded from knowing what he would be in any other relation. The universe is the picture; and Zeuxis the deity; but in this case we cannot even in thought refer to other pictures; nor, if we could, would our inference be profitable. We must therefore always think of our Zeuxis as acting under the same relations as those in which he painted the picture. Zeuxis, as producer of that single effect, is, for us, the only Zeuxis.

29. Hume concludes the essay by asking the question, already noticed in the 'Dialogues,' whether the inference from a unique effect to a unique cause be legitimate? However that question be answered, the argument that such a cause can give us no more than is known in the effect is irrefragable, and in passing the argument overturns by a single stroke the laborious edifice raised by the patient ingenuity of Butler. What, he asks, are we to think of philosophers who hold this life a mere passage to something further; and, what is more, to something contrasted with it; 'a porch which leads to a greater and more vastly different building; a prologue which serves only to introduce the piece, and give it more grace and propriety?'[1] Arguing from present phenomena, we can never, it is abundantly plain, infer anything dissimilar. The Deity may *possibly* be endowed with attributes which we have never seen exerted; but this is a mere possibility, and can never justify an inference. You argue, for example, from the marks of a moral government. 'Are there,' then, 'any marks of a distributive justice in this world? If you answer in the affirmative, I conclude that, since justice here exerts itself, it is satisfied. If you reply in the negative, I conclude that you have then no reason to ascribe justice, in our sense of it, to the gods. If you hold a medium between affirmation and negation, by saying that the justice of the gods, at present, exerts itself in part, but not in its full extent,

[1] Essays, iv. 116.

I answer that you have no reason to give it any particular extent, but only so far as you see it *at present* exert itself.'[1] The ordinary theologian calmly inferred that the next world would be the complement, instead of the continuation, of this, without troubling himself about the logic. Butler, looking at the world through certain preconceptions, painfully convinced himself, not indeed that the facts would justify the inference, but that they would bear being stated so as to harmonise with the theory, when once obtained. No colour can be given to any form of the argument, as I already tried to show, unless we can find a standing-point outside of our experience, when judging of facts. Hume rightly asserts the feat to be impossible; and in his lucid statement, the facts fall into their proper order; and the plausibility of Butler's tortuous reasoning vanishes.[2] How are we to infer the whole from a part; to regard nature, the indifferent, and universal as taking sides in our petty conflicts?

30. That is the ever-recurring difficulty, which reappears in a thousand shapes throughout all theological controversy. If God is less than nature, he is not really God; if identified with nature, then he is not a God whom we can love, fear, and worship. In the 'Dialogues' this difficulty, as we have seen, appears in the shape of a conflict between the anthropomorphic and the ontological conceptions. It may be approached from yet another side. If we fall into hopeless perplexities when discussing the logical basis of the belief, how are we to account for its historical origin? The belief was not originally suggested by metaphysicians, though they may sanction it as they sanction many others which have sprung up spontaneously. Was it, as the orthodox maintained, the result of a direct revelation, the memory of which was preserved by tradition, or can it be explained by any of the ordinary laws of our constitution? Hume's answer is given in the 'Natural History of Religion.'

31. This brief treatise, originally published in 1757, gives Hume's last views upon the philosophy of religion; for the

[1] Essays, iv. 116–7.

[2] The excellent Beattie recommends a perusal of Butler as an antidote to the cavils of this 'flimsy essay.' He is right in noticing their opposition (Beattie's 'Essay on Truth,' part i. ch. ii. sec. 5).

'Dialogues,' not published till after his death, had been already written. The fact illustrates his tendency to turn from abstract reasoning to historical methods. To Hume, of course, the various sources of information from which a history of primitive opinions could be now compiled, were not open. The whole method of modern enquiries into such matters was still unknown. He could see, as the most superficial view of history would suggest, that barbarism must have preceded civilisation, and that, 1700 years ago, polytheism was, with scarcely an exception, the religion of the world. His speculations as to its nature and origin were suggested almost exclusively by the classical writers, or by his own observations of existing modes of thought amongst the ignorant and superstitious. The materials, however, though scanty enough for any minuteness of theory, were sufficient to suggest the main outlines of a scientific view. All ignorant nations are still polytheist; all history takes us back to an age of polytheism; in civilised countries, the vulgar are still polytheists. It is equally plain that the reasoning on which monotheism is ostensibly based implies a cultivated understanding. Polytheism, then, was the primitive religion. What may we conjecture of its origin? Reproduce in imagination the state of the primitive man, and the answer must be obvious. Our happiness depends upon a multitude of unknown causes, whose laws were utterly obscure, and which could only be conceived in the vaguest way by a savage. Now we find in all men a tendency to transfer their own emotions to other objects. The tendency is illustrated in poetry, and has even forced its way into philosophy, and generated such fancies as the horror of a vacuum; and the whole series of sympathies and antipathies. What more natural, then, than that mankind should personify these unknown causes, upon which they so intimately depend, and attribute to them passions and feelings like their own?[1] In modern phrase, the origin of theology is to be sought in fetichism. We need look no further for an answer to our question. Gods so formed are, of course, anthropomorphic. They are not regarded as the creators of the world, but as invisible beings interfering in its affairs, like the fairies of our

[1] 'Natural History,' &c., iv. 317.

own popular mythology. Their worshippers treat them with strange disrespect, as befits beings composed of like materials to themselves.[1] Art takes advantage of these imaginary existences; poets embellish them with allegory; and heroes, remembered for their great deeds, are added to the pantheon, whilst their stories pass, with various distortions, into the great store of tradition.[2] Admitting the truth of hypotheses so easy and so often verified, we come to a further conclusion. The reasons now given for theism are not the source of the belief. Nay, if you ask one of the vulgar at the present day for his reasons, he will not refer you to the order of nature, and the beautiful economy of final causes. He will tell you of sudden deaths, of famines or droughts, which he ascribes to the action of Providence. His reasons are the reverse of the official reasons. 'Such events,' says Hume, and it is one of his most pregnant remarks, 'such events as, with good reasoners, are the chief difficulties in admitting a supreme Providence, are with him the sole arguments for it.' The philosopher relies upon order; the vulgar rely upon the apparent exceptions to order. To deny special interposition is supposed to be a proof of infidelity; and yet a philosophical theist relies upon regularity and uniformity as the strongest proofs of design.[3]

32. If this be true, even of the less educated in theistical nations, it is clear that their theism does not arise from argument. It is really due, says Hume, to the gradual promotion of some favoured deity, upon whom epithets of adoration are accumulated by his special worshippers, until infinity itself has been reached.[4] Are examples of the process required? Did not Jupiter rise to be the Optimus Maximus of the heathen? And the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the supreme Deity and Jehovah of the Jews? Has not the Virgin Mary usurped many of the divine attributes amongst the Catholics? Hume intimates, in a passage softened as it went through the press, that, in the same way, the Jewish God has been developed from the purely anthropomorphic conception indicated in the early chapters of Genesis.[5] He does not add, but his readers would be dull indeed not to infer, that a Jewish peasant has

[1] 'Natural History,' &c., iv. 320–325. [2] Ib. iv. 325–328.
[3] Ib. iv. 329. [4] Ib. iv. 330. [5] Ib. iv. 332.

in the same way been elevated to union with the Supreme Being. The doctrine is confirmed by saying that the vulgar belief, however refined in words, is still essentially anthropomorphic ; and that it is impossible to maintain a pure theism without stimulating a belief in inferior mediators to satisfy the popular imagination.[1] The remainder of the essay contains many interesting remarks upon the strange compromises which arise in the conflict between the philosophic and the vulgar conceptions. Superstition suggests dreadful attributes in the Deity ; philosophy bids us lavish upon him the highest terms of praise. And thus a god may be verbally represented as the perfection of benevolence and wisdom, whilst, in fact, his conduct is represented as outraging all our notions of humanity and justice.[2] The divorce of religion from morality is a natural consequence of the desire to propitiate an imaginary being by services which will appear to be more religious as they have less utility to ourselves or our neighbours.[3] And thus, if the tendency to believe in invisible intelligences may be considered as a stamp set upon man by his Maker, we find that the beings actually created in virtue of this power are stained with caprice, absurdity, and immorality.[4] Religion is blended with hypocrisy ; absurdities are blended with philosophy ; without religion man is a brute ; and yet ignorance is the mother of devotion ; the morality inculcated by many religions is as pure as the practices which they sanction are corrupt ; the hopes which they hold out are most comforting, but they are swallowed up by the more dreadful forebodings suggested. 'The whole is a riddle, an enigma, an inexplicable mystery. Doubt, uncertainty, suspense of judgment, appear the only result of our most accurate scrutiny concerning this subject. But such is the frailty of human reason, and such the irresistible contagion of opinion, that even this deliberate doubt could scarcely be upheld, did we not enlarge our view, and opposing one species of superstition to another, set them a quarrelling ; while we ourselves, during their fury and contention, happily make our escape into the calm, though obscure, regions of philosophy.'[5]

33. Hume has thus touched all the great lines of argu-

[1] 'Natural History,' &c., iv. 333–6.
[2] Ib. iv. 355.
[3] Ib. iv. 359.
[4] Ib. iv. 362.
[5] Ib. iv. 363.

ment which have been made to converge upon the proofs of natural theology, and has pronounced them to be inconclusive and inconsistent. Neither the *a priori* nor the *a posteriori* reasoning can be made to hold water; the anthropomorphism implied in one set of theories is radically opposed to the ontological view implied in the other; if the proof could be made out, it would still lead to an essentially equivocal conclusion, which might be of speculative interest, but could have no bearing upon practice. And, finally, if we apply the historical method, we shall see that the fatal contradiction, which lies at the very root of natural theology, is but the inevitable consequence of its mode of development. Successive explanations of the order of the universe have led men through a complete circle of belief. The change which has made the sun instead of the earth the centre of our system, is not greater than the change which has made the deities the expression of the orderly, instead of an expression of the arbitrary, elements of the universe. But in theology men have retained a single name to express two antagonistic conceptions. The theory of final causes is, in fact, the natural expression of the transitional stage, in which the Supreme Being is conceived as interfering with an external universe, but yet as interfering upon a definite plan. What wonder that the conclusions which try to blend the primitive with the latest mode of thought should yield a fatal antinomy upon analysis! Through many of his arguments, Hume might claim the partial approval of orthodox divines. Before and since his time, distinguished theologians have exhausted language in proclaiming the utter inconceivability of the divine nature; others have insisted upon the incapacity of the unassisted reason to attain to a knowledge of God; and others, again, have denounced all the primitive religions as substantially equivalent to Atheism.[1] To combine their varying theories was to bring out the inherent difficulties of all theology. But another view remained. Theologians have accepted and gloried in the contradiction thus exposed. The familiar words 'very God of very man' remind us that the Christian Church have ordered us to accept this very contradiction as

[1] Hume, 'Natural History,' &c., iv. 320. 'These pretended religionists' (*i.e.* the polytheists) 'are really a kind of superstitious atheists.'

the groundwork of our faith on penalty of damnation. What Hume would have called nonsense, they have revered as mystery; and, it must be admitted that the escape is, in one sense, complete. A man who really renounces reason cannot be reached by reasoning, though there is some difficulty in understanding why he believes, or what he means by believing. In one direction, however, he comes apparently to an issue with the sceptic. Mysteries, it is admitted, can be proved by revelation alone; and revelation, upon the ordinary theory, was to be proved by miracles. To consider the value of this method of proof is, therefore, the final task for Hume's ingenuity.

34. It would be superfluous to treat at length an argument which has been so frequently and elaborately discussed. I will content myself with briefly noticing its place in the general argument. The essay, I may say briefly, appears to me to be simply unanswerable if the premisses implicitly admitted by Hume be accepted. Apparent success has been reached by tacitly shifting the issue, and discussing problems which may be interesting, but which are not the problem raised by Hume. Two modes of evasion have been commonly used, and to point out their nature will be to illustrate the position sufficiently. In the first place, the argument is often shifted from the question whether any evidence can prove a miracle, to the other question, whether there are *a priori* grounds for denying the possibility of miracles. It is tacitly taken for granted that, if a miracle is possible, the proof of a miracle is possible. Now the very purpose of Hume's argument is to set aside as irrelevant the question as to the *a priori* possibility of miracles. And the endless discussions as to the meaning of natural laws, and the possibility of their being modified, imply a continuous *ignoratio elenchi*. Hume stated his argument in this form precisely to avoid such a hopeless controversy. In fact, Hume could not on his own principles deny that a being of indefinably superior powers to the human might affect the ordinary series of phenomena. If an extramundane being can, so to speak, impinge upon the world, we are bound by the theory of causation to anticipate novel effects. The reply, so far as a reply was required, to this hypothesis, is given in the essay on a 'Particular Providence.'

It is simply that, if God be inferred solely from the order of the universe, we cannot logically attribute to him interferences with its order. When Paley calmly says, if we believe in God, there is no difficulty in believing miracles, Hume's answer is plain. If God is the cause of order, belief in him does not facilitate belief in miracles. On the contrary, pure theism, thus explained, really introduces a difficulty in the belief in miracles which is not apparent in Hume's theory of the arbitrary conjunction of cause and effect. The God required by Paley's hypothesis is really the anthropomorphic deity, whose existence is established by Paley's argument from design. If that argument survive Hume's objections, it undoubtedly removes the *a priori* difficulty of belief in miracles. But the difficulty still remains, whether their occurrence can be proved by testimony. Hume's dilemma remains in full force. We must always ask, for no other test can be suggested, whether it is more incredible that men should make false statements, wilfully or otherwise, or that an event should have occurred which is opposed to a complete induction. To know that an event is miraculous is to know that it is opposed to such an induction; and, in that case, Hume's argument, as applied to any such evidence as can ever be contemplated, is conclusive. If the event be not known to be miraculous, then the evidence does not prove a miracle, but proves the existence of a previously unknown law of nature.

35. And here comes in the second mode of evasion. It is denied substantially that the events are miraculous. There is, in a sense, much force in this argument. Undoubtedly, we are continually convinced by evidence, and rightly convinced, of the occurrence of phenomena which we had once supposed to be miraculous. Evidence might convince us that sickness may be cured by methods apparently inadequate to the effect. And it is precisely by such observations that we are led to suspect the soundness of Hume's reasoning. It must be admitted, too, that his favourite theory, that any cause might be joined to any effect, tends to obscure his argument and to perplex his statement. But the answer is obvious. Evidence may certainly prove strange events, but it cannot prove strictly miraculous effects. Now the supposed evidential force of the events in question depends upon their being really miraculous.

If it is not contrary to the laws of nature that the dead should be raised or one loaf feed a thousand men, the occurrence of the fact does not prove that an Almighty Being has suspended the laws of nature. If such a phenomenon is contrary to the laws of nature, then a proof that the events had occurred would establish the interference ; but, on the other hand, it must always be simpler to believe that the evidence is mistaken ; for such a belief is obviously consistent with a belief in the uniformity of nature, which is the sole guarantee (whatever its origin) of our reasoning.

36. Really to evade Hume's reasoning is thus impossible. Its application to popular arguments of the day was, in any case, unanswerable. Theologians who rested not merely the proof of revealed theology, but the proof of all theology, upon miracles, could not even make a show of answering. In any other case, the statement that a man had been raised from the dead would admittedly prove that its author was a liar. The statement thus could not by any logical trick be made valid in the particular case of a religious theory. And this was, more or less avowedly, the position of many orthodox writers. Nor, in the next place, was any escape open to theologians who meant by God the supreme cause of the order of the universe. Their belief increased instead of diminishing the difficulty of the case. The only logical escape is for those who hold that the external intervention of invisible beings of greater strength than human, but not strictly divine, is part of the normal order of the universe. On such an hypothesis a belief in miracles might be tenable, because, strictly speaking, the miracles ceased to be miraculous. The conception, though disavowed by philosophers, was undoubtedly embodied in one form or other in the popular creeds of the day ; and, therefore, the believers in the miraculous might evade Hume's dilemma. But since his time philosophical reasoners have been more and more driven either to pitiable evasions, or to take refuge in intellectual suicide.

37. It may still be asked, what was Hume's real belief? Did his theoretical scepticism follow him into actual life? That is a question for a biographer rather than for the historian of thought. There is a famous saying which has been attributed to the first Lord Shaftesbury, to Garth, to Humboldt, and

probably to others. What is your religion? The religion of all sensible men. And what is the religion of all sensible men? Sensible men never tell. Hume quotes a similar saying of Bacon's. Atheists, says the philosopher, have now-a-days a double share of folly; for, not content with saying in their hearts that there is no God, they utter it with their lips, and are 'thereby guilty of multiplied indiscretion and imprudence.'[1] Hume so far adopted these precepts of worldly wisdom that he left his most outspoken writings for posthumous publication.[2] Yet Hume said enough to incur the vehement indignation both of the truly devout and of the believers in the supreme value of respectability. It is impossible to suppose that the acutest reasoner of his time would have considered his most finished work as a mere logical play, or that he should have encountered obloquy without the justification of sincerity. I have, therefore, no doubt that Hume was a sceptic in theology, that he fully recognised the impossibility of divining the great secret, and that he anticipated this part of what is now called the positive philosophy. Yet, as a true sceptic, he probably did not expect that the bulk of mankind would ever follow him in his conclusions. He felt that, although a rational system of theology capable of affecting men's lives be an impossibility, his own denial of its validity did not quite destroy the underlying sentiment. Though the old bonds were worthless, some mode of contemplating the universe as an organised whole was still requisite. A vague belief, too impalpable to be imprisoned in formulæ or condensed into demonstrations, still survived in his mind, suggesting that there must be something behind the veil, and something, perhaps, bearing a remote analogy to human intelligence. How far such a belief can be justified, or, if justified, made the groundwork of an effective religion, is a question not precisely considered by Hume nor to be here discussed. We may be content to respect in Hume the most powerful assailant of the pretentious dogmatism and the timid avoidance of ultimate difficulties characteristic of his time.

[1] Hume, 'Dialogues,' ii. 388.

[2] The reluctance of Adam Smith to publish the papers committed to him by his friend, though not unnatural, is surely discreditable.

# DAVID HUME.

1711. April 26, O.S., born at Edinburgh.
1734. Goes to France (Rheims and La Flèche in Anjou).
1737. Returns to Scotland.
1739. 'Treatise of Human Nature,' vols. i. and ii.
1740. „ „ „ vol. iii.
1741. 'Essays Moral and Political,' vol. i.
1742. „ „ „ vol. ii.
1745. Tutor to Lord Annandale.
1746. Accompanies expedition to French coast with General St. Clair.
1748. Accompanies General St. Clair on a military embassy to Vienna and Turin.
— 'Philosophical Essays concerning Human Understanding.'
1751. 'Enquiry concerning Principles of Morals.'
'Dialogues concerning Natural Religion' (composed at this time, but not published till 1779).
1752. 'Political Discourses.'
— Keeper of the Advocate's Library.
1754. 'History of England,' vol. i. (James I. and Charles I.)
1756. „ „ vol. ii. (Charles II. and James II.)
1757. 'Four Dissertations' (containing the 'Natural History of Religion'; the Essays on 'Suicide' and the 'Immortality of the Soul' originally prepared for this volume were suppressed until 1777).
1758. 'Essays Moral and Political' (collection of pieces already published; other editions, with some omissions and additions, in 1760, 1768, 1770, and 1777).
1760. 'History of England,' vol. iii. (House of Tudor).
1762. „ „ vol. iv. (from Julius Cæsar to Henry VII.)
1763. Accompanies Lord Hertford to France; becomes Secretary to Embassy.
1766. Returns to England and becomes Under Secretary of State.
1769. Returns to Edinburgh.
1776. Aug. 25. Dies at Edinburgh.

A full account of the various editions of Hume's works during his lifetime is given in the third volume of his philosophical works (vol. i. of Essays), edited by Messrs. Green and Grose. London, 1874–5. References to this edition.

## CHAPTER VII.

### WILLIAM WARBURTON.

1. In the course of the once celebrated controversy between Warburton and Lowth, Lowth made one hit which must have told forcibly upon his opponent. He quoted the following passage from Clarendon's History: 'Colonel Harrison was the son of a butcher near Nantwich, in Cheshire, and had been bred up in the place of a clerk, under a lawyer of good account in those parts; which kind of education introduces men into the language and practice of business, and, if it be not resisted by the great ingenuity of the person, inclines young men to more pride than any other kind of breeding, and disposes them to be pragmatical and insolent.' 'Now, my Lord,' says Lowth, 'as you have in your whole behaviour and in all your writings remarkably distinguished yourself by your humility, lenity, meekness, forbearance, candour, humanity, civility, decency, good manners, good temper, moderation with regard to the opinions of others, and a modest diffidence of your own, this unpromising circumstance of your early education' (Warburton had, like Harrison, been articled to an attorney) 'is so far from being a disgrace to you, that it highly redounds to your praise.'[1] Which piece of irony, pardonable, perhaps, as a retort to Warburton's sneers at Lowth's Oxford training, expresses the most conspicuous feature of Warburton's character—namely, that he was as 'proud, pragmatical, and insolent' as a man who brought to theological controversies the habits of mind acquired in an attorney's office might naturally be expected to show himself. Warburton, in fact, is the most perfect specimen of a type not unfrequent among clergymen. We may still, though less often than was once the case, observe a man in the pulpit who ought to be at the bar; and though the legal habits of

[1] Lowth's 'Letter to Warburton' (2nd edition), p. 64.

mind may be an admirable corrective to certain theological tendencies, a frequent result of thus putting the round man in the square hole is to produce that incongruity which in another profession has given rise to the opprobrious term, sea-lawyer. Warburton, as we shall presently see, was a lawyer to the backbone in more senses than one; but his most prominent and least amiable characteristic was the amazing litigiousness which suggested Lowth's sarcasm.

2. For many years together Warburton led the life of a terrier in a rat-pit, worrying all theological vermin. His life, as he himself observed in more dignified language, was 'a warfare upon earth; that is to say, with bigots and libertines, against whom I have denounced eternal war, like Hannibal against Rome, at the altar.'[1] Amongst bigots and libertines we must reckon everyone, Christian or infidel, whose faith differed by excess or defect from that of Warburton, and add that Warburton's form of faith was almost peculiar to himself. To entertain a different opinion, or to maintain the same opinion upon different grounds, gave an equal title to his hostility. He regrets, in one place, the necessity of assailing his friends. 'I have often asked myself,' he says, and nobody has ever answered the question, 'what I had to do to invent new arguments for religion, when the old ones had outlived so many generations of this mortal race of infidels and free-thinkers? Why did I not rather choose the high road of literary honours, and pick out some poor critic or small philosopher of this school, to offer up at the shrine of violated sense and virtue?' In that case he thinks that he might 'have flourished in the favour of his superiors and the good-will of all his brethren.'[2] According to himself, it was the love of TRUTH which carried him away. His creed had that unique merit which he ascribes to the Jewish religion—namely, that it 'condemned every other religion for an imposture.'[3] To disagree with him was to be not merely a fool, but a rogue. So universal, indeed, was his intolerance of any difference of opinion, that bigot and libertine, wide as is the sweep of those damnatory epithets, can by no means include all the objects of his aversion. He makes frequent incursions into regions

[1] Letters to Hurd, p. 346.
[2] Warburton's Works, iv. 79.
[3] Ib. iv. 74.

where abuse is not sanctified by theology. The argument set forth in the 'Divine Legation' wanders through all knowledge, sacred and profane, and every step brings him into collision with a fresh antagonist. Glancing at his table of contents, we find a series of such summaries as these:—'Sir Isaac Newton's chronology of the Egyptian empire confuted and shown to contradict all sacred and profane antiquity, and even the nature of things;' 'Herman Witsius' arguments examined and confuted;' a prophecy 'vindicated against the absurd interpretations of the Rabbins and Dr. Shuckford;' the Jews 'vindicated from the calumnious falsehoods of the poet Voltaire;' 'an objection of Mr. Collins examined and confuted;' 'the Bishop of London's discourse examined and confuted;'[1] and, in short, his course is marked, if we will take his word for it, by the corpses of his opponents. Deists, atheists, and pantheists are, of course, his natural prey. Hobbes, 'the infamous Spinoza,'[2] and Bayle, Shaftesbury, Collins, Toland, Tindal, Chubb, Morgan, and Mandeville, and, above all, his detested enemy Bolingbroke, are 'examined and confuted' till we are weary of the slaughter. But believers do not escape much better. If, as he elegantly expresses it, he 'trims Hume's jacket'[3] for not believing in the miracles, he belabours Wesley still more vigorously for believing that miracles are not extinct. From Conyers Middleton, who, indeed, escaped for some years as a personal friend, up to Sherlock and Lowth, he spared neither dignity nor orthodoxy. The rank and file of the controversial clergy, Sykes, and Stebbing, and Webster, fell before his 'desperate hook' like corn before the sickle. And when the boundless field of theological controversy was insufficient for his energies, he would fall foul of the poet Akenside for differing from him as to the proper use of ridicule, or of Crousaz for misinterpreting Pope's 'Essay on Man,' or of Bolingbroke for attacking the memory of Pope, or of a whole swarm of adversaries who gathered to defend Shakespeare from his audacious mangling. The innumerable hostilities which did not find a vent in any of these multitudinous conflicts struggled to light in notes on the 'Dunciad.' Probably no man who has lived

[1] See table of contents to fourth and fifth books, vol. iv.
[2] Warburton, v. 124.
[3] Letters to Hurd, p. 239.

n recent times has ever told so many of his fellow-creatures that they were unmitigated fools and liars. He stalks through the literary history of the eighteenth century, trailing behind him a whole series of ostentatious paradoxes, and bringing down his controversial shillelagh on the head of any luckless mortal who ventures to hint a modest dissent. There is, it cannot be denied, a certain charm about this overflowing and illimitable pugnacity. We have learnt to be so polite that it occasionally suggests itself that the creeds which excite our languid sympathy or antipathy are not very firmly held. It is at least amusing in this milder epoch to meet a gentleman who proposes to cudgel his opponents into Christianity and to thrust the Gospel down their throats at the point of the bludgeon.

3. Even Warburton, complex and many-sided as were his hostilities, was not above the necessity of finding allies. No man, though gifted with the most perverse ingenuity, can stand quite alone. Warburton formed two remarkable connections. As is not uncommon with men of boisterous temperament, both these friends were remarkable for qualities in which he was deficient. An alliance of two Warburtons would have formed a combination more explosive and unstable than any hitherto known to psychological chemistry. Pope and Hurd, his two friends, were suited to him by force of contrast. Warburton was well fitted to be Pope's bully, and Hurd to serve as the more decorous assistant of Warburton's vengeance. Pope seems to have been really touched by Warburton's blustering championship. It doubtless pleased him to discover that he had been in reality talking sound religious philosophy, when he had been too plausibly accused of versifying second-hand infidelity. The thin-skinned poet welcomed with infantile joy the alliance of his pachydermatous defender, and naturally inferred that the man who had discovered him to be an orthodox philosopher must be himself a profound divine. Warburton took a natural pride in having cut out so rich a prize from under the guns of the infidel Bolingbroke; and raised himself in general esteem by acquiring a right of spiritual proprietorship in the literary ruler of the age.

4. The friendship with Hurd is more curious and cha-

racteristic. Hurd is a man for whom, though he has attracted a recent biographer,[1] animated by the ordinary biographer's enthusiasm, it is difficult to find a good word. He was a typical specimen of the offensive variety of University don; narrow-minded, formal, peevish, cold-blooded, and intolerably conceited. As Johnson said of 'Hermes' Harris, he was 'a prig, and a bad prig.' Even Warburton, it is said, could never talk to him freely. In his country vicarage he saw nobody, kept his curate at arm's length, and never gave an entertainment except on one occasion, when Warburton, who was staying with him, rebelled against the intolerable solitude.[2] As a bishop, he never drove a quarter of a mile without his episcopal coach and his servants in full liveries. His elevation to the bench was justified by his fame—for which there are, perhaps, some grounds—as an elegant writer of Addisonian English and a good critic of Horace. The virtue which he particularly affected was filial piety. After five years' acquaintance, his Christian humility led him to confide to Warburton, the son of a country attorney, that his own father was a farmer.[3] He was sufficiently amiable to speak in endearing terms of his mother; and, in a letter to Warburton, after touching upon certain presentation copies of one of his books, and on Sir John Dalrymple's newly-published Memoirs, observes quite pathetically that the good woman 'almost literally fell asleep' about a fortnight before.[4] Warburton, though not a very lofty character, had, at least, a little more human nature in his composition.

5. The relations between the pair recall, in some degree, those between Johnson and Boswell. Warburton, however, is but a feeble-jointed and knock-kneed giant in comparison with the great lexicographer, and Hurd but a dry and barren counterpart to Boswell. The flattery in this case was reciprocal; and perhaps the great man pours out more mouth-filling compliments than his satellite. If Hurd thinks that Warburton's memory will be endeared to the wise and the good for ever, Warburton takes Hurd to be one of the first

[1] See Kilvert's 'Life of Hurd.'

[2] See Cradock's 'Memoirs,' i. 180. It is fair to say that Cradock, who saw a good deal of him, considered him to be 'intrinsically good.'

[3] Letters, p. 161. [4] Ib. p. 473.

men of the day, and holds him to be Addison's equal in 'correctness,' whilst far superior to him in strength of reasoning.[1] The two looked out with condescension upon Warburton's humbler jackals, and with superb contempt upon the rest of mankind. The general principle of their common creed is neatly expressed by Hurd, who observes that one 'hardly meets with anything else' than coxcombs in this world.[2] To which Warburton adds the comment, that 'nature never yet put one grain of gratitude or generosity into the composition of a coxcomb.'[3] The application of this maxim to particular cases shows that Horace Walpole is an insufferable coxcomb;[4] Johnson full of malignity, folly, and insolence;[5] Garrick, a writer below Cibber, whose 'sense, whenever he deviates into it, is more like nonsense;'[6] Young, 'the finest writer of nonsense of any of this age;'[7] Smollett, a 'vagabond Scot,' who 'writes nonsense 10,000 strong;'[8] Priestley, 'a wretched fellow;'[9] and Voltaire 'a scoundrel.'[10] Hurd carefully preserved this correspondence, and left it for publication after his death, hoping that the reader would forgive the 'playfulness of his (Warburton's) wit,' in consideration of the faithful portraiture of character.

6. The mode in which these congenial spirits co-operated during their lives may be sufficiently illustrated by their quarrel with Jortin. Jortin, who had been on excellent terms with Warburton, mildly observed, in a 'Dissertation on the State of the Dead,' as described by Homer and Virgil, that Warburton's 'elegant conjecture' as to the meaning of the sixth book of the 'Æneid' (a conjecture chiefly remarkable as affording the occasion of one of Gibbon's first literary efforts) was not satisfactorily established. Hereupon Hurd published a pamphlet bitterly assailing Jortin for his audacity. Hurd's elaborate irony, as translated by a contemporary writer, amounted to presenting the following rules by which the conduct of all men should be regulated in presence of the great master:—

'You must not write on the same subject that he does.

[1] Letters, p. 458. [2] Ib. p. 377. [3] Ib. p. 378. [4] Ib. p. 387. [5] Ib. p. 367. [6] Ib. p. 439. [7] Ib. p. 285. [8] Ib. p. 278. This means that 10,000 copies of Smollett's History were said to have been sold. [9] Ib. p. 442. [10] Ib. p. 466.

You must not write against him. You must not glance at his arguments even without naming him, or so much as referring to him. You must not oppose his principles, though you let his arguments quite alone. If you find his reasonings ever so faulty, you must not presume to furnish him with better of your own, even though you approve and are desirous to support his conclusions. You must not pretend to help forward any of his arguments that happen to fall lame, and may seem to require your needful support. When you design him a compliment, you must express it in full form, and with all the circumstances of panegyrical approbation, without impertinently qualifying your civilities by assigning a reason why you think he deserves them; as this might possibly be taken for a hint that you know something of the matter he is writing about as well as himself. You must never call any of his discoveries by the name of conjectures, though you allow them their full proportion of elegance, learning, &c.; for you ought to know that this great genius never proposed anything to the judgment of the public (though ever so new and uncommon) with diffidence in his life.'[1]

7. The infringement of such rules as these was, in fact, all that Hurd could lay to Jortin's charge. Warburton welcomed the assistance of his jackal with a shout of delight. He knew of but one man from whose heart or whose pen so fine a piece of irony could come. Next to his pleasure in seeing himself so 'finely praised,' was his truly Christian pleasure 'in seeing Jortin mortified.'[2] And in a following letter he remarks that 'they must be dirty fellows indeed, who can think I have no reason to complain of Jortin's mean, low, and ungrateful conduct towards me'[3]—that is to say, the conduct of openly expressing a difference of opinion as to a critical question. Jortin afterwards revenged himself upon Hurd's master by pointing out a blunder in the translation of a Latin phrase. Warburton, unable openly to deny the error, made a surly overture to Jortin, which was coldly accepted; but no real reconciliation followed. The two

[1] See Watson's 'Life of Warburton,' pp. 440, 441. Hurd's pamphlet is republished in Parr's 'Tracts by a Warburtonian,' and fully justifies the above description.

[2] Letters, p. 207.

[3] Ib. p. 210.

conspirators abused Jortin in private,[1] but did not continue open hostilities.

8. The almost incredible arrogance of which this is a specimen breathes in every page of Warburton's serious writings. His style is too cumbrous to be effective; he has not the acuteness or the temper to aim at the joints in his opponent's armour; he is content to belabour them with huge clumsy blows, which make a noise, but do little mischief in proportion.[2] His epithets are mere random substitutes for profane oaths. When, for example, he calls the Moravian hymn-book 'a heap of blasphemous and beastly nonsense,'[3] or says of Grey's Commentary upon 'Hudibras,' that he hardly thinks that 'there ever appeared in any language so execrable a heap of nonsense,'[4] we do not feel that 'blasphemous and beastly' in the one case, and 'execrable' in the other, give a distinct definition of these rival 'heaps of nonsense.' He, therefore, hardly does as much mischief as he could have wished to 'the pestilent herd of libertine scribblers with which the island is overrun, whom I would hunt down as good King Edgar did his wolves, from the mighty author of "Christianity as Old as the Creation," to the drunken blaspheming cobbler who wrote against "Jesus and the Resurrection;"'[5] or to those 'agents of public mischief, who not only accelerate our ruin, but accumulate our disgraces—wretches, the most contemptible for their facts, the most infernal for their manners.'[6] Amongst the contemptible, pestilent, and infernal wretches, were men whose shoe-latchet he was not worthy to unloose; and it is difficult not to feel a foolish desire that Warburton could have had revealed to him the true relations between himself and his antagonists. Of Hume, for example, he says, in what is probably the feeblest of his works, for it is that which takes him furthest out of his depth, that he merely runs 'his usual philosophic

[1] Letters, pp. 270, 271.

[2] The same might be said of Churchill's abuse of Warburton in the third book the 'Duellist,' which is about worthy of its victim. Churchill is to Pope what Warburton was to Swift.

[3] Warburton's Works, viii. 343. [4] Preface to Shakspeare.

[5] Ib. xii. 59. The last reference is to a pamphlet attributed to Morgan, the Moral Philosopher, but really by Annet. See above, ch. iv. sec. 60.

[6] Ib. iv. 12.

course from knavery to nonsense;'[1] and he adds that Hume's 'great philosophic assertion of one of the master-wheels of superstition, labours with immoveable nonsense.' Of a statement of Voltaire's about the Jewish hostility to the human race, he observes: 'I think it will not be easy to find, even in the dirtiest sink of freethinking, so much falsehood, absurdity, and malice heaped together in so few words.'[2] Hume and Voltaire have survived Warburton's attacks, and we may allow our natural resentment to drop. Time has avenged them sufficiently. I add, though with some reluctance, a couple of illustrations of the lengths to which Warburton's 'playfulness of wit' could sometimes carry him. 'Even this choice piece of the first philosophy, his lordship's (Bolingbroke's) sacred pages, is ready,' he says, 'to be put to very different uses, according to the tempers in which they have found his few admirers on the one side, and the public on the other; like the china utensil in the Dunciad, which one hero used for a ——pot, and another carried home for his headpiece.'[3] And here is his retort to poor Dr. Stebbing, who conceived himself to have shown that a prophecy was equally relevant, whether Warburton's interpretation were or were not admitted. 'He hath shown it indeed,' snorts his antagonist, 'as the Irishman showed his ——.'[4]

9. Warburton's confidence in his own invincibility was unsurpassable. Every now and then he pledges himself that some argument shall never again be regarded in the 'learned world' as anything but an ignorant prejudice; whilst a similar boast from an antagonist is declared to be worthy only of some 'wild conventicle of Methodists or Hutchinsonians.' His confidence is so great that he ventures to take the dangerous line of insisting upon the strength of the enemy's case.

[1] Ib. xii. 352. One specimen of Warburton's remarks upon Hume may be noticed; as it seems to imply that he could not have read the essay which he is attacking with ordinary attention. Hume 'confesses,' says Warburton, 'that there are popular religions in which it is expressly declared that nothing but morality can gain the divine favour' (xii. 373). Hume's words are: 'Nay, if I should suppose, *what never happens*, that a popular religion were found, in which it was expressly declared,' &c. (Works, iv. 357). Hume wisely maintained silence.

[2] Warburton's Works, v. 9.

[3] Ib. ii. 263. This passage, in an appendix to the 'Divine Legation,' is a polished version of a coarser form in the Letters on Bolingbroke (xii. 185).

[4] Ib. xi. 404.

[5] Ib. iv. 347.

Nobody had thoroughly confuted Collins, until Warburton searched the matter to the bottom. Nay, it might be doubted whether the weight of argument was not, on the whole, against Christianity, till he turned the scale. For want of the master-key by which he unlocked all puzzles, 'the Mosaic dispensation had lain for some ages involved in obscurities, and the Christian had become subject to insuperable difficulties.'[1] The very conception of such an expedient, concealed from the eyes of all theologians till the middle of the eighteenth century, and now for the first time to provide an immovable basis for the superstructure of revealed religion, is a sufficient index of its inventor's religious insight. It confirms the natural inference from the characteristics hitherto noted that Warburton is a worthless writer. And it is true that his writings are in substantive value below even the low level of the later theology of his age. He never seems to understand that the great question is one of facts, not of words. He is worth study solely as the most striking example of certain tendencies embodied in contemporary thought, and exhibited by him upon an abnormal scale. Yet he flourished for a time. 'He is, perhaps, the last man,' says Johnson, 'who has written with a mind full of reading and reflection.' He succeeded in impressing his contemporaries by sheer bulk; and few cared to recognise the obvious fact that this colossus was built up of rubbish. He resembles, in the width and indiscriminate application of his learning, some of the great writers of the preceding century. From an external glance he might be taken to be the last of that great brotherhood. Many men have spoken more to the purpose in a page than he has done in many volumes; but it is worth while to consider what were the conditions under which a man possessed of huge brute force, though of no real acuteness, could blunder on so gigantic a scale.

10. Warburton's strange passion for a paradox is admitted by himself with a quaint complacency. After stating, for example, that 'if the Scriptures have,' as Middleton had said, every possible fault which can deform a language, 'this is so far from proving such language not divinely inspired, that it is one certain mark of its original;'[2] he winds up his demon-

[1] Warburton's Works, vi. 256. See also Letters, p. 31, as to Collins, and a similar remark about Tindal, p. 267.

[2] Ib. viii. 281.

stration by asserting that the Koran became to true believers 'as real and substantial a pattern of eloquence as any whatsoever;' and adds that this is a paradox, 'which, like many others that I have had the odd fortune to advance, will presently be seen to be only another name for truth.'[1] He is never so proud as when he has hit upon some proposition so ingeniously offensive to all parties, that, as he puts it, 'believers and unbelievers have concurred, by some blind chance or other' in objecting to it.[2] The Warburtonian paradox is one of a class unfortunately too common. It is not the paradox produced by the excessive acuteness which, seizing upon some new aspect of a subject, fails properly to correlate its conclusions with established principles. Warburton is sometimes paradoxical, as a deaf man writing upon music might be paradoxical. He blunders into the strangest criticisms upon Shakspeare or the Bible, from sheer absence of poetical or spiritual insight. More often his paradoxes resemble those of a pettifogging lawyer, content to strain the words of a statute into any meaning that may serve his turn, without the slightest regard to its spirit. The Bible is his Act of Parliament, and to him one argument is as good as another if it can be twisted into a syllogism with a text of Scripture for its premiss. He is fond of quoting Hobbes's inimitable maxim that words are the counters of wise men and the money of fools. It is unfortunately applicable to his own practice. The fundamental though unconscious assumption of many people is, that reasoning is not a process of discovering, but of inventing, truth. Logic, they seem to think, is a process by which new conclusions may be manufactured. Given a certain set of assumptions, there can be only one right conclusion, and that conclusion may be that no certainty is obtainable. But many people fancy that a sufficiently skilful logician might distil truth out of the most unsatisfactory materials. They measure his skill by the length of the chain of reasoning; and fail to see that the best logician is often the man who pronounces the materials to be insufficient. Reasoning thus becomes a mere game of skill. A proper manipulation of the 'counters' will enable a good player to win a victory, where a bad one would suffer defeat. The sentiments, proper enough

[1] Warburton's Works, viii. 289. [2] Ib. iii. 315.

in a mere game of scholastic fence, are transferred to matters of scientific research. The clever dialectician who can puzzle his adversary is assumed to show the same qualities as the profound and accurate reasoner.

11. Such qualities become prominent only in a time when the desire for truth has grown weak; and the anxiety to attain a knowledge of facts is superseded by the curiosity excited by a display of dialectical fencing. At such a time, however, the writings of a Warburton have a certain incidental interest. He brings into startling relief the current opinions of the day. A man of genius is guided by an unconscious instinct which prevents him from obtruding the more offensive side of his doctrine. A Warburton, utterly wanting in logical tact, blurts out the absurdities which the judicious keep in the background. He splashes indiscriminately through thick and thin, and unintentionally reveals the errors of his allies. Indeed, we may find in Warburton, in all their native absurdity, some arguments which still pass muster by the help of a little philosophical varnish.

12. The 'Divine Legation' is an attempt to support one gigantic paradox by a whole system of affiliated paradoxes. Warburton, as Bentley shrewdly said, was a man of 'monstrous appetite and bad digestion.' Johnson applied to him a couplet from Savage:—

> Here learning, blended first and then beguiled,
> Looks dark as Ignorance, as Frenzy wild.

He has tumbled out his intellectual spoils into his ponderous pages with boundless prodigality. Starting with the professed intention of vindicating Moses, he diverges into all manner of subsidiary enquiries. He discourses upon the origin and nature of morality; he gives the true theory of the alliance of Church and State; he devotes many pages to an elucidation of the ancient mysteries; he discusses the origin of writing and the meaning of hieroglyphics; he investigates the chronology of Egypt; he indulges in an elaborate argument to determine the date of the book of Job; he assails all freethinkers, orthodox divines, Jews, Turks, Socinians, classical scholars, antiquarians, and historians, who may happen to differ from any of his opinions. At every stage in the argu-

ment new vistas of controversy present themselves; and as every phenomenon in the universe is more or less connected with every other, Warburton finds abundant excuses for rambling from end to end of the whole field of human knowledge when an adversary is to be encountered, or a bit of reading to be illustrated, or, in short, any caprice to be gratified. It is not wonderful that a man pursuing so vast a plan, and stirring so many prejudices at every step, should have wearied of his task before it was completed, and have sunk into episcopal repose before the edifice received its crowning ornaments.

13. The position, as Warburton conceived it, was this. The deists had been pressing on with overweening confidence from their reliance upon a certain argument. They had made, so he assures us,[1] a great point of the supposed absence from the Old Testament of any distinct reference to a future state of rewards and punishments. Apologists of Christianity had been put to awkward shifts, and had endeavoured by strained interpretations to relieve the Jewish creed from this imputation. Warburton proposes to discover a new move in the game (he maintains, in a characteristic passage, that there is as much room for new discoveries in religion, as for new discoveries in science)[2] by which the deists, with victory just in their grasp, may be stale-mated. He resolves to admit the very proposition for which they had contended, and to convert the admission into what his title characteristically describes as a 'demonstration' of the truth of the Mosaic religion. The demonstration—one, as he informs us, which falls 'very little short of mathematical certainty, and to which nothing but a mere physical possibility of the contrary can be opposed'[3]—is comprised in three very clear and simple propositions. The first is, that the doctrine of a future state of rewards and punishments is necessary to the well-being of society; the second, that the utility of this doctrine has been admitted by all mankind, and especially by the wisest and most learned nations of antiquity; the third, that this doctrine

[1] I must confess that I do not even know to what particular writings Warburton alludes in this main assumption. Certainly the point is not commonly urged by the deists whom he chiefly assails.

[2] Warburton's Works, vi. 228.

[3] Ib. i. 199.

is not to be found in the Mosaic dispensation. The statement bears insincerity upon the very face of it. The reasoning is intended to be startling, and asserted to be obvious. Warburton boldly says that one would have thought that 'we might proceed directly to our conclusion that therefore the law of Moses is of divine original.'[1] Yet, as some persons may be stupid enough to miss the force of his argument, he draws it out more fully in elaborate syllogisms. Substantially they amount to the assertion that Moses would not have omitted a sanction which he knew to be essential had he not had a certainty of miraculous interference. The statement that he ventured into the desert without an adequate provision of food, might be urged as a proof that he reckoned upon a supply of quails and manna; and, similarly, the statement that he started as a legislator without so essential a spiritual provision as a belief in hell, is taken by Warburton to show that he reckoned upon a supernatural substitute for the terrors of the next world. We shall see directly what it was. Grotesque as the argument appears, and must have been intended to appear when thus bluntly stated, it is scarcely more than a caricature of a favourite method of arguing. Some apologists still venture to maintain that the Christian doctrine was revolting to the ordinary mind in order to prove that its success was miraculous. An admission that it suited the wants of the time may suggest that its growth was spontaneous. They, therefore, urge that human nature is revolted by a teaching of humility and purity, as Warburton declared it to be so corrupt that nothing but the fear of hell could check the progress of decay.

14. It will be enough to notice briefly the critical points of the strange system erected upon this doubtful foundation. The whole argument obviously rests upon the assumption that nothing but a belief in a future world can sustain the moral law. The facts, as stated by Warburton, would seem to confute the theory. If the Jewish economy, as he said, prospered, and the Jews, as he says, knew nothing of a future state, the obvious inference is that the belief is unnecessary to national prosperity. No, says Warburton, in substance; the facts contradict my theory; therefore, the facts were miraculous.

[1] Warburton's Works, i. 200.

This reliance upon the infallibility of an *a priori* argument, or rather of a round assertion, gives at once the key to his whole book. He attempts, indeed, to prove the doctrine—one sufficiently familiar to his contemporaries—though his proofs are as feeble as most of his speculative flights. He asserts in a great many words that men will not be virtuous unless they are paid for it. Neither a moral sense, nor a perception of the fitness of things, will be sufficient motives without the obligation of a superior will. Nothing else can 'make actions moral, *i.e.* such as deserve reward and punishment.' This, of course, is the familiar theory of Waterland or Paley. But nobody can dispute the originality of Warburton's application. That Moses, being well acquainted with the importance of the belief, for the Moses of Warburton is a highly intelligent politician of the eighteenth century, should have omitted to preach it, is strange enough. But the paradox, pretty enough as it stands, is heightened by an appendix. The ancient philosophers, as Warburton tells us, generally disbelieved the doctrine, and yet preached it for its utility. And thus we have the curious phenomenon that the one inspired teacher in the world neglected to preach, whilst all the false teachers systematically preached, the one vital doctrine of all morality, and in both cases acted in opposition to their real belief.

15. In seeking to account for the singular fact that a man of true, though coarse, intellectual vigour should have cheated himself into a state of mind so far resembling belief in this grotesque doctrine as to stake his reputation upon maintaining it, we come to the heart of Warburton's position. The best test of the civilisation of a race, it has been said, is the conception which it has formed of the Deity. The remark is applicable to others than savages. In one of his fierce assaults upon Bolingbroke, Warburton says, 'I should choose to have the clergy's God, though made of no better stuff than artificial theology (because this gives him both justice and goodness) rather than his Lordship's God, who has neither, although composed of the most refined materials of the first philosophy. In the meantime, I will not deny that he may be right in what he says, that men conceive of the Deity *more humano*, and that his Lordship's God and the clergy's God are

equally faithful copies of themselves.'[1] Warburton's view of the Mosaic dispensation will enable us to form a tolerably adequate portrait of this Deity, formed of artificial theology, who was a 'faithful copy' of the Bishop of Gloucester. What logical grounds Warburton would have assigned for his belief is a question which matters very little; because the plain fact is that the conception in his mind did not really repose upon any philosophical argument whatever.

16. The God of Warburton, then, is, in the first place, the omnipotent legislator and chief justice. It is his function to sentence to condign punishment the Bolingbrokes, Spinozas, Tindals, and other offenders against morality; and to enact and to promulgate, from time to time, the laws by which his creatures, or any part of them, were to be bound. Now Warburton's hypothesis seems to imply a capriciousness in God's behaviour to the Jews for which it is difficult to account. A full explanation was to have been given in the last book of the 'Divine Legation;' but Warburton became too weary to finish up his argument. Archdeacon Towne, one of Warburton's humble friends, was grieved at the omission, and could only make the rather lame apology that a system might be true and well founded, though objections to it never had been nor could be answered.[2] He admitted that adversaries would triumph, and even urge that the bishop was unable to answer the difficulties he had raised. We need not lament the absence of one more verbal distortion of logic. For some reason, unexplained or inexplicable, God had chosen to manage the Jews on a peculiar system, or, as Warburton calls it, by an extraordinary providence. The ordinary human being is punished or rewarded in the next world according to his deserts in this. But in the case of the Jew, each man received his full reward in the present life. The necessity of any belief in a future life, nay, it would seem, of a future life at all, was thus obviated. The proof of this strange proposition is everywhere. 'It would be absurd to quote particular texts when the whole Bible is one continued proof of it.' We can, indeed, dispense with any historical proof. It must have been so, 'for a people in

[1] Warburton's Works, ii. 254.

[2] 'Literary Remains,' p. 179.

society, without both a future state and an equal Providence' (that is, a Providence equally working in this world) 'could have no belief in the moral government of God,' and would have relapsed into a savage state. Therefore, to prove that the Jews did not believe in a future state, is to prove that they had an 'equal Providence.' The ordinary argument for a future state would break down if all crimes were sufficiently punished, and all virtues sufficiently rewarded, in this world. As the Jews did not believe, they cannot have been in presence of the facts which convince us. This is the superlative expression of the assumption that the Jewish hsitory refers to a state of things outside of our ordinary experience. As Warburton says, in attacking Plutarch, 'we know (though he did not) that all things (in the Jewish history) were extraordinary, and nothing to be brought to example any more than to imitation.'[1] A singular sentiment, surely, for a sound divine! and yet a characteristic result of the tacit compromise by which the miraculous element was retained in the past and banished from the present.

17. The doctrine of an equal Providence required some corollaries to make it fit notorious facts. Thus, for example, it scarcely accounts at first sight for the punishment of children for their father's sins. But Warburton can always stop a gap by a new hypothesis. Though evildoers amongst the Jews met with temporal punishment, there are 'men of stronger complexions, superior to all fear of personal temporal evil.' The knowledge that an Almighty power would punish them—a knowledge which, according to Warburton, rested on the immediate testimony of their senses—would not restrain these desperate ruffians. They were, therefore, to be reached through the 'instinctive fondness of parents to their offspring.'[2] This punishment supplied, for such persons, the absent terrors of hell. That a man who would not be restrained by dread of Almighty vengeance should be controlled by fear of the consequences to his great-grandchildren, is a queer doctrine in Warburton's mouth; but the justice of the proceeding is still more questionable than its efficiency. Warburton defends it characteristically. God, he says, was here acting, not as the Almighty Governor of the universe,

[1] Warburton's Works, iii. 243. [2] Ib. v. 164.

but as the civil governor of the Jews. In a theocracy sin must be treasonable. 'Now we know it to be the practice of all states to punish the sin of leze majesty in this manner. And to render it just, no more is required than that it was in the compact (as it certainly was here) on men's free entrance into society.'[1] He proceeds to defend the system more fully by appealing to the English laws of forfeiture for high treason. Warburton caps the worst absurdities of his fellows; but he is only expressing more articulately and systematically an argument familiar to them in some shape. God was often justified by showing that his conduct was conformable to the provisions of the British Constitution.

18. Other difficulties, of course, abound. What, for example, was to become in the next world of the Jews to whom a full recompense had been meted out in this? Bolingbroke made a great point of this objection, and Warburton blusters more than usual in the attempt to evade it. As to future punishments, he retreats under the usual subterfuge of admitting the fact to be mysterious, and then boasting of his admission as though it were a solution of the difficulty. As to rewards, he says that he does not grudge the Jews the advantage of a double payment. To meet the case of men of the pre-Mosaic age, he invents a 'secret reprieve' (kept 'hid, indeed, from the early world,' and, it may be added, from all the predecessors of Warburton) 'passed along with the sentence of condemnation. So that they who never received their due in this world, would still be kept in existence till they had received it in the next; such being in no other sense sufferers by the administration of an unequal Providence, than in being ignorant of the reparation which attended them.' God, like some kings of previous ages, could agree to a treaty in public, and make a private reservation to break it when he thought fit.

19. This singular confusion between the attributes of the Deity and those of a constitutional monarch underlies all Warburton's argumentation. There is but one God, and Warburton is his attorney-general. Like other persons standing in that relation to earthly potentates, he finds the obligation to defend the policy of his government at all

[1] Warburton's Works, v. 167.

hazards not a little burdensome. Once, after a long argument destined to indicate the wisdom, purity, and justice of the Almighty, he asks pathetically: 'How can I hope to be heard in the defence of this conduct of the God of Israel, when even the believing part of those whom I oppose seem to pay so little attention to the reasoning of Jesus himself?'[1] The difficulty is increased by the complexity and variability of the system adopted in the government of the universe. The Almighty generally acts as a constitutional ruler, with a scrupulous regard for the exigencies of his position; he refrains from miracles, as such a king would refrain from bringing his personal influence to bear upon politics; but, in certain cases, for which it is difficult to assign any principle, he chose to govern as well as to reign, and produced a variety of complex relations, which it tasks all Warburton's skill to unravel. The Law of Nature, so often cited by the deists and their opponents, is the Common Law of the Universe, and like that of England, supposed to embody the perfection of human wisdom. The details were capable of being defined with mathematical accuracy, and Warburton has drawn out some of its provisions with a startling minuteness. We are a little surprised, for example, to discover that 'an ESTABLISHED RELIGION with a TEST LAW is the universal voice of Nature.'[2] But we must leave Warburton's politics for the moment, to illustrate his religious application of the doctrine. The essence of all religion, as he frequently says, is a belief in the divine system of rewards and punishments—a proposition which he illustrates by St. Paul's words, containing the most concise statement of natural religion. God is a rewarder of those who seek him. He may reward here or hereafter; but 'piety and morality spring only from the belief that God is, and is a rewarder.'[3] The voice of nature, however, does not tell us that these rewards should be eternal. He boldly asserts that the notion of eternal penalties, instead of being discoverable by, is absolutely revolting to the unassisted intellect; and that 'fancy, even when full plumed by vanity,'[4] could scarcely rise to the idea of infinite rewards. The law of nature may be enforced by some future penalties, but cannot

[1] Warburton's Works, iv. 323.
[2] Ib. ii. 292.
[3] Ib. iii. 323.
[4] Ib. vi. 251.

define their amount; and the specifically Christian doctrine of immortality is rather repulsive than probable. When, therefore, the Almighty interferes by direct personal action, there arises a distinction between the law of nature and the statutes promulgated by the Divine Legislator.

20. The results are exceedingly complex. Mankind, for example, occupied a different legal position towards their Maker, in the periods before the Fall, and in the interval between the Fall and the appearance of Moses; and the divine prerogatives differed as they affected Jews and Gentiles. The great change took place when the Almighty 'took upon himself the office of supreme magistrate of the Jewish people.' Having resolved for some inscrutable reason to govern them by temporal instead of eternal punishments, there arose the difficulty as to their proper position in the world to come. God, says Warburton, 'proceeded on the most equitable grounds of civil government;' he became King of the Jews 'by free choice;' and he thus acquired certain privileges, as, for example, that of prosecuting idolaters as traitors. But as direct punishment, though supplemented by the sufferings of posterity, became inadequate, he enacted a cumbrous ceremonial, destined to distract popular attention from the claims of pretenders, that is, of false gods. One Herman Witsius[1] had protested against attributing to God the 'tricks of crafty politicians;'[2] and Warburton admits that the wisdom displayed was identical in kind with 'what we call human policy,' though it differed in degree. He excuses it on the convenient theological ground, that God used his miraculous power as little as possible, though he is arguing that all Jewish history was one stupendous miracle.

21. Difficulties thicken. After a time, God appointed an 'under-agent or instrument;' the Jewish kings became his viceroys; and Warburton has to prove that the change did alter the essence of the form of government. David, he says, was called the man after God's own heart, because he 'seconded God's views in support of the theocracy.'[3] He was, in fact, like Lord Bute, a thoroughgoing king's friend. The Jews,

[1] A learned Dutch theologian (1636–1708), who, amongst other writings, maintained against Spenser that the Egyptians had borrowed from the Jews.

[2] Warburton's Works, iv. 324.

[3] Ib. iv. 312.

badly as they behaved, could not withdraw from the covenant which occupied the place of the original compact in the theocracy; for it is against all principles of equity that one party to a contract should repudiate it at pleasure. God, therefore, retained his rights; but, in consequence of the misbehaviour of his subjects, declined to exercise them. Thus we have the curious result, that, whilst the theocracy existed *de jure*, it ceased to operate *de facto*. Penalties and rewards were no longer exacted in this world, and though no revelation had hitherto been made of a future life, prophets began to discover its existence. From this fact, amongst other things, we may determine the precise date of the book of Job. The purpose of that book is to discuss the difficult problem suggested by the prosperity of the wicked and the adversity of the virtuous; and, as Warburton says, no satisfactory conclusion is reached. It must therefore have been written at the critical period when rewards and punishments ceased to be administered in this world, and the next had not been discovered. Gradually, however, the new doctrine became clear, until the theocracy was finally abrogated, and the Almighty ceasing to be the 'family God of the race of Abraham,' or the 'tutelary Deity, gentilitial and local,' became the constitutional governor of the universe, governing only through second causes, and directly interfering only upon critical occasions.

22. Man thus stands in the most varying relations to his Maker. Some of his claims depend upon positive law; others upon equity; sometimes he must stick to the terms of a particular bargain; sometimes he may go upon the general principles of the law of nature; immortality is a free gift (sometimes, it must be confessed, of very questionable benefit), and may therefore be granted subject to any regulations arbitrarily imposed by the giver. Some kind of future reward is a strict legal right, and must necessarily be granted on condition of repentance; persecution is lawful under a theocracy, and becomes intolerable under any other circumstances, where the law of nature imperatively demands a test law, but forbids any more stringent discouragement of dissent; eternal punishment is detestably cruel if judged by ordinary principles of reason, but quite justifiable if it has been made the subject of a revelation; and the Jews were

governed by the Almighty on principles which to the human intellect appear to be simply eccentric, and which varied materially at different stages of their history, and were totally different from anything that has prevailed before or since. The lawyer's clerk had not forgotten his early training when he excogitated this amazing theory of the legislative organisation of the universe. The 'infamous' Spinoza warns his readers to be specially on their guard against confounding the power of God with that of human rulers or with human law.[1] Warburton illustrates the results of systematically disregarding this warning.

23. One other side of Warburton's teaching must be noticed. One of the most vehement of his polemical writings was directed against Wesley. In the course of it, he remarks that 'the power of working miracles, and not the conformity of Scripture doctrines to the truth, is the great criterion of a divine mission.'[2] Accordingly, we find that he has an intense affection for a miracle, tempered by a strong desire to show that any particular miracle has been misunderstood. Defending, for example, the miracle supposed to have been wrought to defeat Julian's reconstruction of the Temple at Jerusalem, he argues valiantly for the truth of the main incident; but he is almost equally anxious to prove that some of the subsidiary incidents were not miraculous. It is stated that crosses appeared in the sky and on the garments of the spectators. Warburton produces some curious parallel instances, in which such crosses are said to have actually appeared in consequence of a thunderstorm, and of an eruption of Vesuvius. These he attributes to natural causes. 'The fathers,' he says, 'are so impatient to be at their favourite miracles, the crosses in the sky and on the garments, that they slip negligently over what ought principally to have been insisted on, the fiery eruption; and leave what was truly miraculous to run after an imaginary prodigy.'[3] The fathers who believe too much, and the infidels who believe too little, are equally censured, though it seems hard upon the fathers to condemn them for want of familiarity with events in the seventeenth century. Warburton's credulity is as capricious as his logic. He seems actually to have

[1] See 'Ethics,' part ii. prop. iii.
[2] Warburton's Works, viii. 390.
[3] Ib. viii. 138.

believed in an absurd prophecy uttered by one Arise Evans during the Commonwealth, though he admits Evans to have been a notorious rogue; and he inserted an interpretation of the prophecy in one of Jortin's works. But when poor Wesley was rash enough to publish those accounts of modern miracles with which his journals are so curiously stuffed, the episcopal wrath knew no bounds. That a man living in his own time, and that man an ecclesiastical rebel, should produce miracles to confirm his foolish fancies was intolerable. Some of Warburton's ridicule of the great religious leader might have been pardonable in a man who had not exaggerated the sphere of the miraculous beyond all other writers; but his arguments are curiously characteristic. Miracles, he says, are no longer required. The martyrs, in the dismal days of yore, might have wanted such a support; 'but now the profession of the Christian faith is attended with ease and honour; and the conviction which the weight of human testimony and the conclusions of human reason afford us of its truth is abundantly sufficient to support us in our religious perseverance.'[1] It is easy enough to be a Christian when a defence of Christianity is the direct road to a bishopric; but Wesleyans might smile at the quiet assumption that Warburton, rather than the Methodists, presented the closest analogy to the early martyrs of the faith.

24. The very plan of the treatise is significant. The treatise on the Doctrine of Grace is, like his other writings, ambidextrous. He is not happy unless he can be slaying the freethinker with one hand, and the enthusiast with the other. He therefore begins by assailing Middleton for his assertion that the gift of tongues was temporary. He maintains that, far from disappearing after its first manifestation, it lasted through the apostolic age. But, having overthrown this antagonist, he is equally vigorous against the other who goes upon diametrically opposite principles. He clutches at a text and tortures it after his own fashion. The decisive passage is the celebrated saying of St. Paul: 'Charity never faileth; but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there shall be knowledge, it shall vanish away.' After due manipulation, the meaning

[1] Warburton's Works, viii. 319.

of this clause in the statute-book comes out as follows: 'The virtue of Charity is to accompany the Christian Church through all its stages here on earth; whereas the gifts of prophecy, of strange tongues, of supernatural knowledge, are only transitory graces bestowed upon the Church in its infirm and infant state, to manifest its divine birth, and to support it against the delusions of the powers of darkness.'[1] He explains in the same spirit the statement that 'when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away;' perfection, it seems, having been attained at the end of the apostolic age; and he has thus the pleasure of administering a blow at one additional enemy, the Church of Rome, in whose pretences 'the blunder seems to be as glaring as the imposture.'[2] On such grounds, the man who held that the whole Jewish history was one continued miracle for many centuries, and who was willing to put faith in Arise Evans, denounced Wesley for his folly and impiety in believing that God might do in the eighteenth century what he had done in the first. Wesley succeeded where Warburton failed, just because his God—whether the true God or not—was at least a living God; whereas Warburton's had sunk into a mere heap of verbal formulas.

25. Was Warburton an honest man? Did he believe in the theories thus coarsely and ostentatiously maintained? That any man could 'believe' in them, in the sense in which belief means a force capable of governing action, may be pronounced impossible. We have not the right to say that Warburton did not believe that he believed, or, in other words, that he had not cheated himself before he cheated his followers. Disraeli maintains, in the 'Quarrels of Authors,' that Warburton was throughout guided by 'a secret principle;' this secret principle was 'invention;' in other words, apparently, a morbid love of paradoxical novelty. He points to Warburton's curious admiration for Bayle, a writer who, in Warburton's own language, 'struck into the province of paradox as an exercise for the restless vigour of his mind,' and was unable to overcome that 'last foible of superior geniuses, the temptation of honour, which the academic exercise of wit is conceived to bring to its professors.'[3] Certainly,

[1] Warburton's Works, viii. 309. [2] Ib. viii. 315. [3] Ib. i. 230.

Warburton is describing his own practice. The 'academic exercise of wit' employed upon the most important of all human enquiries, forms the staple of his books. But Warburton had not Bayle's acuteness. His paradoxes imply verbal dexterity, instead of logical power. We admire his impudence more than his intellectual audacity. Lowth speaks of Towne as shrinking behind Warburton's 'mighty Telamonian shield,'

> With seven thick folds o'ercast
> Of tough bull-hide; of solid brass the last.

That brazen defence sheltered Warburton in his life, and even enabled him to impose upon posterity. An admiring reviewer[1] did not shrink from declaring that, whilst Hooker, Stillingfleet, Chillingworth, Locke, Jeremy Taylor, and Swift, might have contributed the erudition, acuteness, imaginative power, and sarcastic wit of the 'Divine Legation,' Warburton alone could have amassed the materials into a comprehensive, consistent, and harmonious whole. We fairly stand aghast at such a saying, and are tempted to bow down before the colossal impudence which could thus find defenders beyond the grave. Indeed, Warburton's fame loomed so vast in the eyes of the ordinary reader, that his name is still at times quoted with respect, as though his alliance with any cause could be aught but an encumbrance.

26. Some insinuations have been thrown out that Warburton was really as unbelieving as he was certainly lax in his religious observances.[2] To us it matters little what degree of consciousness of the natural tendency of his arguments may have penetrated to the inner depths of his mind. The fact which, for my purpose, is alone interesting, is the bare circumstance that such a book as the 'Divine Legation' could ever have passed for a serious defence of Christianity. To explain, we must revert once more to the real problem which was vexing men's minds. How, it may be stated, could the God of the universe be also the Jehovah of the Jews, and the three persons of the Christian Trinity? How can we reconcile philosophy with the traditional creeds?

[1] Dr. Whitaker, in the 'Quarterly Review,' vol. vii.

[2] See Disraeli's 'Quarrels of Authors,' in the 'Miscellanies' (edition 1840), p. 158.

Hume's answer is decisive. God is a name for our ignorance. The Jews were a semi-savage race, who invented a corresponding deity to account for unintelligible phenomena. The Christian Trinity is the creation of later philosophical speculation, strangely combined with an earlier traditional element. We have grown wiser, and know that we know nothing. Nature means the aggregate of sensible phenomena, and we cannot pierce behind them. Butler's answer is more hesitating in tone, but still rests upon an intelligible principle. We know little, indeed ; we are lost in mysteries, if once we dare to enquire, and it is safer not to push enquiries too far. But, in the midst of the darkness, we may find a sufficient guide in the conscience, which bears with it evidence of divine origin. Natural religion describes the general order of the world as detected by reason acting under their guidance upon the materials supplied by experience. Revealed religion professes to describe the same general order on the direct authority of the Almighty. The coincidence of the two doctrines affords a strong presumption of the authenticity of the claims of revelation ; and, therefore, of the identity of the God of revelation with the God of nature. The external evidences confirm the presumption thus based upon independent grounds. The dealings of Jehovah with the Jews, and of the Christian God with believers, are such as we might anticipate from a fair observation of nature, and are not such as we should anticipate from the God of the deist. Nature, that is, rightly interrogated, confirms revelation and destroys Deism. We cannot find God either in nature or revelation, said Hume ; we can dimly see God in both, said Butler, and the features are alike. The God of nature is unlike the God of revelation, said Warburton ; but they are the same, because both are called God.

27. Warburton thus leaves the two conceptions as different as he found them. He does not seriously attempt to consider the reasons which should lead us to accept either, or prefer one to the other. He is content simply to bring them into contact, and welds them together by the help of words. Jehovah is as different as possible from the God of reason or from the God of Christianity. Certainly, says Warburton, God acts on different principles at different times. We cannot believe

in miracles, said the deist; they are produced by 'enthusiasm' or imposture, as in the case of Wesley and Mahomet. Warburton fully agrees that there have been no miracles for the last sixteen centuries; but miracles were as abundant as you please in the preceding ages of the world. The Jewish history, said the deists, was incredible because it contradicted all that we know of human nature, and often offends our belief in the moral attributes of God. Warburton accepts the facts, but he explains them by assuming that God has changed in the course of centuries. He argues as if an orthodox advocate should now maintain against positivists that the world was once ruled by fetishes, afterwards by a number of gods, and finally by one Supreme God. It is a fundamental canon of all historical enquiry, and, indeed, of all science, that the laws now operative in the world have operated throughout the period under observation. A slow realisation of this doctrine was transforming our conceptions of past history. Warburton uses his human and capricious deity to evade it, and being perfectly satisfied with a verbal answer to any difficulty, imagines that, by accepting the worst consequences attributed to his creed, he is really answering them.

28. The phenomenon represented by the Warburtonians would be scarcely worth notice were it not for the imposing bulk of their leader, and for the fact that his errors are but magnified reproductions of confusions common enough amongst less sophistical reasoners. They have their source in the same weakness—the unwillingness, characteristic of all the controversialists from Butler downwards, to face the final questions. Even the bare external plausibility of Warburton's logomachy vanishes when he is asked what he means by God, and why he believed in such a God as his theory demands. That was just the question which no writer, except Hume, dared to ask openly. It was, therefore, impossible to apply a real test to the various theories which justified God by lowering him to the level of humanity, or which filled a gap in the optimist's creed by an abstract phrase. The controversy had to go deeper, and to arouse stronger passions, before it could be cleared of the unreality which must beset every controversy in which both sides shrink from probing the dispute to the bottom. Meanwhile,

such a braggart as Warburton could, for a time, impose upon the world, though keen thinkers sneered, and pious souls were revolted, at speculations as perplexed in logic as irreverent in temper.

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## WILLIAM WARBURTON.

Dec. 24, 1698. Born at Newark.
1714. Articled to an attorney.
1723. Ordained deacon.
1727. Ordained priest and presented to Greaseley.
— 'Critical and Philosophical Enquiry.'
1728. Presented to Brant-Broughton, by Sir R. Sutton.
1730. Presented to Frisby.
1736. 'Alliance between Church and State.'
1737. 'Divine Legation,' books i., ii., iii.
1738. Chaplain to Prince of Wales.
1738–9. Defends Pope against Crousaz.
1740. Acquaintance with Pope, who died in 1744.
1741. 'Divine Legation,' books iv., v., vi.
1745. Marriage to Gertrude Tucker, niece of Ralph Allen.
1746. Preacher at Lincoln's Inn.
1747. Edition of Shakspere.
1750. 'Julian.'
1751. Edition of Pope.
1752–4. Sixty-seven Sermons.
1753. Prebend of Gloucester.'
1754–5. 'View of Bolingbroke's Philosophy.'
1754. King's Chaplain and D.D.
1755. Prebend of Durham.
1757. Dean of Bristol.
— 'Remarks on Hume.'
1760. Bishop of Gloucester.
1762. 'Doctrine of Grace.'
1768. Founds the Lectureship at Lincoln's Inn.
June 7, 1779. Dies.

1788. Fragments, including 'Divine Legation,' book ix.
1809. Correspondence with Hurd. Second edition: 1809.
1841. Literary Remains.
1863. Life by J. T. Watson.

References to Warburton's Works. London: 1811.

# CHAPTER VIII.

## THE LATER THEOLOGY.

### *I. INTRODUCTORY.*

1. THE most conspicuous literary phenomenon in the latter half of the eighteenth century in England is the strange decline of speculative energy. Theology was paralysed. The deists railed no longer; and the orthodox were lapped in drowsy indifference. They boasted of the victory won by their predecessors; but were content on occasion to recapitulate the cut and dried formula of refutation, or to summarise the labours of the earlier enquirers. The one divine of brilliant ability was Paley; and Paley's theology escapes, if indeed it escapes, from decay, only because it is frozen. His writing is as clear and as cold as ice. In traversing this parched and barren district, we shall scarcely meet with one fresh spring of original thought; and our journey must be a weary one.

What were the causes of this sudden failure of energy? An answer which professed to be exhaustive would be self-condemned. We have not yet learnt the secret of the periodicity of intellectual effort. We can but imperfectly explain why at one moment, theology, poetry, or science, burst forth with the fulness of spring, and afterwards subside into the saddened calm of winter. Yet some of the main causes are sufficiently obvious; and a brief consideration of the external circumstances and of the logical position of the thinkers of the time may throw light upon the characteristics of their theology.

2. The English deists, silenced in their own country, were still preaching through the mouth of Voltaire; and their example had, in some measure, contributed to the awakening of German thought.[1] But England, the land of philosophers

[1] Upon this subject see Lechler's 'Geschichte des Englischen Deismus,' pp. 444-452.

and freethinkers, no longer gave birth to iconoclasts or to serious investigators. Another set of topics was coming to the front in contemporary literature. Political discussions absorbed the energy of the keenest intellects. The first half of the eighteenth century had been a period of political stagnation. The classes who had won power in 1688 held their own with little trouble against the reactionists whose last feeble effort was suppressed in 1745. The Jacobites once crushed, there ensued a period of absolute peace, where the reformation of the Calendar figures as the most exciting event of a parliamentary session. But new and more dangerous questions were making their appearance. The groundswell of an approaching revolution became ever more perceptible. Amidst Wilkite agitations and American troubles, and contests between the king's friends and the great revolution families, parties were slowly developing themselves, divided by deep political differences instead of mere personal alliances, and half consciously preparing for the advent of those vital struggles of which we can distinguish the importance, though it is not yet given us to foretell the end. England, in common with the whole European community, was being slowly sucked into the vortex of the great whirlpool, and already waves were running high, and dim forebodings clouding the more thoughtful minds. It was natural that, under such conditions, the keenest intellects should be turning from speculative to practical discussions. The literary landmarks of the period are political, not theological. For Hume's Essays and Butler's 'Analogy,' we have Burke's Speeches and Adam Smith's 'Wealth of Nations.' Junius's Letters and a countless host of political pamphlets evoke the passions which in the previous generation had been called forth by Tindal, Collins, Woolston, and their opponents. In the first half-century, Bolingbroke naturally sought refuge from the hopeless game of politics in philosophical enquiries ; in the last half, Priestley as naturally left his laboratory and his library to plunge into the more exciting world of political strife.

3. The political movement naturally replaced the theological in England as on the Continent. But in England, the conditions of the struggle rendered it more exclusively political. English constitutionalism, English Protestantism, and

that peculiarity, whatever its origin, which predisposes the English mind to compromises, all tended in this direction. In France, an absolute secular and an absolute ecclesiastical authority were intimately united. Between Catholics and atheists, absolutists and revolutionists, there was no available standing-ground. Blows aimed at the State or the Church had an immediate and palpable reaction upon the Church or the State. The philosophers were in deadly hostility with the supporters of the established order; and the gulf yawned wide, deep, and impassable along the whole line of division. In England, doubtless, the real tendencies of the rival schools were at bottom the same. Here, as elsewhere, the faith and the framework of the old order were inseparably united. The freethinkers of an earlier generation had naturally allied themselves with the Whigs in their common warfare against the claims of the clergy. The inevitable connection, however, between the religious and the political movements was by no means so evident; nor did the true bearings of the new ideas reveal themselves to all men till Paine and Godwin brought back the revolutionary impulse from France. Both in speculation and in practice, the natural result of the spirit of compromise was to confuse the plain issues. Under Protestant influences, theology had become penetrated and honeycombed by rationalism; and under the parliamentary system the separation between Church and State had already made considerable progress. Thus hybrid forms of opinion were easily generated. Believers in dogmatic theology might assail the state without attacking religion; and sceptics might support the established order without committing themselves to the defence of the ecclesiastical theory.

4. Thus the political movement in England took place along the old constitutional lines, and presented itself rather as a return to older principles, than as a fiercely subversive impulse. The English agitators claimed a descent from the old Puritans rather than from modern freethinkers. Wilkes and Horne Tooke might have sat at the feet of Voltaire, but their chief supporters were solid dissenting tradesmen. In their political agitations they were careful to avoid expressions of opinions which would have shocked the good aldermen who talked about the Bill of Rights, at least as much as they

would have shocked the judges and the bench of bishops. Dissenters, then as now, were the backbone of the popular party, and dissenters represented the staunchest religious prejudices of the nation. If the bishops were attacked, the implied contrast was not in favour of Voltaire, but of Wesley. The sceptical element was latent, and when at length it came to the surface, it alienated the great bulk of the party.

5. Meanwhile, the rationalist tendencies of the Church rendered it little obnoxious to sceptics. The more intellectual infidels would have had little pleasure in destroying an establishment which, whilst it did them little mischief, was a useful barrier against enthusiasm. Interpreted by men like Paley, Hey, and Watson, there was nothing very burthensome in its tenets. Hume and Paley are curiously agreed in recommending young men of freethinking tendencies to take orders.[1] The rationalism of the English Church was so marked, that an unwillingness to conform to its laws could only result from an unusual sensitiveness to the duty of intellectual candour. The ablest sceptics of the last half of the century were either conservatives or, at any rate, opposed to the revolutionary movement. Pure scepticism, indeed, naturally implies an unwillingness to disturb any established order; and Voltaire, except when guided by his righteous hatred of persecution, was little more of a revolutionist at heart than Hume. But Voltaire could not utter sceptical opinions without becoming, however unintentionally, the accomplice of the revolutionary party; whereas, Hume and Gibbon, the ablest of the English sceptics, were by taste and sympathy emphatically on the side of order. The scepticism widely diffused through the upper classes was of the indolent variety, implying a perfect willingness that churches should survive, though faith might perish.

6. Hence, the English political movement showed no distinct ecclesiastical character. The dissenters occasionally attacked the test laws, and the rationalising part of the clergy were anxious for a relaxation of the Articles. But the existence of the Church was not seriously threatened, or not threatened in the interests of unbelief. A smothered

[1] Burton's Life; Hume, ii. 187. Paley's Works, i. xvii. Hume's view is, of course, far more lax than Paley's.

discontent at purple-clad prelates, and at rich sinecurists, or even a passionate assertion that the corruptions of Christianity were due to the principle of an establishment, were very different things from denunciations of the Church as the embodiment of Christianity. Thus the agitation did not stir the depths of men's minds. When the foundations of society are breaking up, men are forced to recognise the truth that a complete division between religion and politics is chimerical. The true principles on which society should be organised can only be determined by answering the questions which lie at the base of all religious theory. Political speculations involve ethical assumptions, and these again rest upon religious dogma. But the English controversies, though they implicitly involved, failed to bring distinctly before the national mind, the deepest of all divergencies. Reformers, for the moment, proposed to redistribute power more equitably —not to reconstruct society. Arguments about the relations of the Crown to the House of Commons did not obviously lead to disputes as to human nature and the origin of society. Discussions as to the right of juries to judge of the law as well as the facts, had no obvious connection with the Christian religion. Before the questions could be settled, indeed, they branched out into endless disputes, opening always wider and more dangerous controversies. Litigation about a point of law may kindle a war for the conquest of an empire. But such consequences were, as yet, visible only to a man of unusual insight here and there. And thus the first effect of a reviving interest in politics was to lead men's minds away from the deepest problems of philosophy to mere superficial enquiries. No passionate atheist proposed to dissolve the bonds of society, and no orthodox defender of the established order asserted the divine right of kings. The period was one of vehement, but not of profound, excitement. Theology was not concerned, except so far as it was involved in the general interests of respectablility, and everybody wished to be respectable. A keen interest in politics—using the word, not in the philosophical sense, but in the sense of election agents and parliamentary manœuverers—does not prepare the atmosphere for deep theological speculations.

7. Whilst external circumstances were thus favourable to a shallow view of the everlasting problem, the logical development of the deistical disputes told in the same direction. Theologians are, as we shall see, almost exclusively occupied in discussing the historical value of the Christian records. The claims of Christian theology are avowedly based upon the authenticity and fidelity of ancient records. If certain facts could be proved to have happened 1,700 years ago, then was Christianity true; otherwise false. Such a phase of mind naturally followed, as I have already endeavoured to show, upon the extinction of the old deistical impulse. The attempt at forming an independent 'religion of nature' had culminated with Tindal; that is, about the year 1730. After that date, the issue had gradually come to rest more and more distinctly upon the historical question. Hume and Middleton, in attacking the truth of miraculous narratives, had stated the problems with which their successors chiefly occupied themselves. The religion of nature had expired of inanition. Hume's keen scepticism had pierced its vitals, and it had no intrinsic vitality. Tired with its frigid mathematical axioms, men fell back upon an examination of the facts. The historical method was the natural result; but potent as that method has since appeared to be, it gave birth in its infancy to a singularly crude and barren form of enquiry. The ideas to which it owes its force had not yet been assimilated; and, indeed, had scarcely dawned upon the world. What passed for historical enquiry was, for the most part, as meagre as what generally passed for political discussion. The historical method, in fact, must repose upon a distinct realisation of the theory of evolution. The slow development of complex social forms and of phases of human thought from the primitive forms of life, is the dominant idea which is gradually remoulding our religious and scientific conceptions. But, at present, the world presented itself to most observers in the light of the old metaphysical enquirers. It was an inorganic collection of facts, from which the divine illumination had died away, and which was bound together by the classifications of *a priori* thinkers. Social contracts and arbitrary theories about 'the scale of beings' supplied hypotheses for reasoning about society or the

universe, but were, at best, chilling, and unreal. Some imperfect glimpses of a more scientific synthesis gave rise to the crude theories of progress and of human perfectibility which became fashionable towards the end of the century. In another direction we may recognise the first crude attempts at that bastard offspring of historical enquiry which is embodied in modern romanticism, and the revivalism of dead creeds and arts. But the historical impulse, though strongly marked, is not yet under the guidance of a truly scientific impulse. Hume, the keenest intellect of the century, is a representative example of the change which was taking place. It was in 1752 that he deserted metaphysics for history. The barrenness of ontology being demonstrated, he turned to methods more promising of fertile results. Unluckily he was far less qualified for the field of observation than for speculation. His History, as modern critics assure us, is, at best, a graceful summary of superficial knowledge. Even if his researches had been more satisfactory from an antiquarian point of view, he had not the sympathy with alien modes of thought necessary to turn his knowledge to account. But Hume was certainly not less in sympathy with the mediæval spirit than Paley with the early Christian spirit. Hume, in fact, is to Carte what Paley is to Lardner. Each writer is content with a lucid summary of the external facts already collected, though collected in confused masses. Their aim, and for the time it was doubtless a useful aim, was to reduce these confused aggregates into some kind of order. The order, unfortunately, was of the mechanical, not of the vital, kind. Past events are regarded exclusively from the outside; and Jews, Romans, and ancient Englishmen were names in a book, not human beings who once moved and lived on this tangible earth. It was only by a slow process of education that historians were to arise to a vivid realisation of the extinct social phases. For the present, the theologians who argued most strenuously for the truth of the Gospel narratives realised most imperfectly what such events could be. The imagination lagged behind the reason. The shadow of the supernatural lingered over the ancient histories, and rendered them still unreal, though not preserving their ancient symbolical beauty. The increased attention to

history is a marked and most important characteristic of the time; but the history was still colourless, and mechanical in spirit.

8. Another influence was beginning to exert itself with marked effect. Gilbert Wakefield complains that the learned are 'mostly engaged in political disquisitions, or in pushing their researches into the unexplored regions of natural philosophy.'[1] In fact, we have reached the period where the conflict between science and theology begins to put on something of its modern form. Franklin had snatched the sceptre from kings and the lightning from the hands of a supernatural ruler. New provinces were being brought beneath the sway of science. The triumph of the Newtonian philosophy had exercised a potent influence over the preceding generation. A fresh outburst of scientific discovery was producing effects still more important, though marked by no such dramatic catastrophe. Chemistry was beginning to reveal its wonders. Geology was coming to life; and, though in an earlier period its conclusions had been applied to the confutation of sneers at the Flood, people were now beginning to feel seriously that the first chapter of Genesis was in danger. The tendency to appeal to the observation of facts was slowly spreading beyond the limits of natural science. Sir W. Jones was beginning the studies which have led to the formation of comparative mythology, and Adam Smith was endeavouring to apply scientific methods to the explanation of social phenomena. New prospects were opening themselves in every direction; and the mental horizon beginning to expand. It was still, indeed, a day of small things and of crude theories. Men's minds were only awakening to the vast possibilities arising from the systematic application of scientific method. A lively curiosity was being excited rather than a genuine spirit of enquiry. The superficial knowledge obtainable did not suggest how deeply our whole conceptions of the universe would be modified by the ideas still in their infancy. Natural science in the earlier part of the century had been regarded with good-humoured contempt as a pursuit of bugs, beetles, and mummies; and the 'virtuoso' was one of the established topics for the delicate ridicule and coarse satire of Addison, Pope,

[1] Preface to 'Essay on Inspiration.'

Swift, and Shaftesbury. Now it was beginning to be recognised that such pursuits might be a creditable investment of human energy, though, as yet, it was hardly suspected that an examination of bugs or of mummies might lead to results in which theology, history, and politics might be profoundly concerned. A deeper knowledge of science and of history has led to a reopening of the most noted questions with which the human mind can be conversant. The first glimmerings of the new light tended rather to withdraw men's minds from such questions for the moment and amuse without thoroughly awakening them. In Germany, partly it may be from the absence of political counter-irritants, partly from the social organisation of the country, partly from the national character, or from causes not here definable, the intellect was more rapidly aroused to a sense of the vast interests at stake. In France, the conditions which determined the approach of a tremendous catastrophe produced a more uncompromising and internecine warfare upon first principles. In England, the national intellect seemed for the time to have abandoned all serious philosophical enquiry, and occupied itself exclusively with party politics, with superficial history, and with popular science. Neglecting, for the present, certain exceptions to these conclusions, we may say that the general result upon theology was to produce a literature more meagre and superficial than any which had flourished since the days of Hooker. The giants of those days were but dwarfs compared to their predecessors or their successors; and the chief interest is in exhibiting the rare germs of future developments of thought.

## II. THE COMMON-SENSE SCHOOL.

9. Using the phaseology of the time, we may say that the first effect of the conditions thus described was the disappearance of the controversy upon internal evidence. We hear no more of the attempts to adjust the rival claims of Christianity and the religion of nature. Occasionally, however, we come upon an argument dealing rather with the theory than with the external history of religion. One or two instances may be briefly noticed before proceeding to describe the main

stream of discussion—if that can be called a stream which seems rather to stagnate idly in the ancient channels. What speculative power existed in English literature seemed to have been banished to the North of the Tweed. Reid and his followers were there giving such answer as they could to Hume's scepticism. The attitude assumed by these writers is defined in Beattie's 'Essay on Truth' and Oswald's 'Appeal to Common Sense.' Beattie, a most exemplary, warm-hearted, though hot-headed, or 'perfervid' Scot, no mean poet, and an excellent writer of prose, was held by such a man as Johnson to have 'confuted' Hume. Another, and for such purposes not much inferior, critic, George III., showed his appreciation of Beattie by always keeping one copy of the Essay at Kew, and another in London. His approval was implied by the more tangible compliment of a pension of 200*l.* a year conferred upon the defender of true philosophy. The Essay passed rapidly through several editions, was translated into Dutch, French, and German; and obtained degrees for its author from Oxford and foreign Universities. Beattie, in short, became a man of mark; and his success seems to have given some annoyance to Hume.[1] And yet it is now universally acknowledged that Beattie proved simply that he was unable to understand either Hume, Berkeley, or their predecessors. Reid's philosophy, though of doubtful value, is at least the serious attempt of a man of genuine intellectual power to refute Hume's scepticism. Beattie's Essay is simply an appeal to the populace on the most refined metaphysical questions, backed up by passages of angry scolding. Nothing, as he says in a 'postscript,' added to defend himself against the charge of indecent warmth, is 'more perfectly contemptible than the speculative metaphysics of the moderns,' that is, as appears from the general argument, of Descartes, Malebranche, Locke, Berkeley, and Hume. 'I know no end,' he says, 'that the study of such jargon can answer, except to harden and stupify the heart, bewilder the understanding, sour the temper, and habituate the mind to irresolution, captiousness, and

[1] Beattie, in his preface, takes to himself part, at least, of the curious advertisement in which Hume, withdrawing his early philosophical treatise, says that 'several writers' had affected to triumph over him by unfair attacks upon his juvenile work, instead of confining themselves to the later exposition of his theories.

falsehood. For studies of this sort I have neither time nor inclination, head nor heart.'[1] He excuses himself, however, for railing with the utmost bitterness against the reasoning which he thus admits himself to be incapable of understanding. Scepticism may be allowable in regard to points of mere curiosity; but scepticism is utterly hateful when it makes men doubt whether the 'human soul is a real and permanent substance,' whether God exists, or whether 'virtue and vice are distinctly and essentially different.'[2] Such scepticism, he says, is 'totally subversive of science, morality, and religion,' and therefore deserves no quarter.

10. The argument which commends itself to such a writer is naturally the argument from consequences—a method which he explicitly defends.[3] It is easy to imagine what form it takes in his hands. Berkeley is challenged to walk over a precipice. A doctrine which would lead to such results must be the most 'scandalously absurd' ever heard of. 'There is not a fiction in the Persian tales that I could not as easily believe; the silliest conceit of the most contemptible superstition that ever disgraced human nature is not more shocking to common sense, nor more repugnant to every principle of human nature.'[4] If it were seriously adopted, and if (which is taken to be an identical proposition) men were 'divested of all belief, and consequently of all principle, would not the dissolution of society and the destruction of mankind necessarily ensue?'[5] If we were all to walk over precipices! When Berkeley is thus confuted, Hume comes in for equally hard measure. It logically follows, according to Beattie's interpretation of Hume, that the idea of an inch is an inch long. 'Now mark the consequence;' if I am in a room of 1000 cubical feet content, I may introduce into it an idea of St. Paul's, say, which may contain a million cubical feet in content, or I can transport a mountain as big as the Peak of Teneriffe in a postchaise.[6] Hume, therefore, is absurd.

11. Some such consequences have been alleged by abler critics than Hume to follow logically from the theories of Berkeley and Hume; but Beattie does not trouble himself to prove his interpretation. This is what he supposes to be the

[1] Essay, p. 388.
[2] Ib. p. 391.
[3] Ib. p. 292.
[4] Ib. p. 205.
[5] Ib. p. 215.
[6] Ib. p. 182.

conscious teaching of his antagonists; and he has little trouble in alarming the common sense of persons who, like the worthy George III., would take his word for it. If Reid appeals to common sense, using the phrase with a philosophical meaning, Beattie appeals to it in its vulgar acceptation. Whatever people generally believe must be therefore true. The soul must be distinct from the body, because he never heard of a nation that denied it.[1] The will must be free, because Mr. Macaulay asked the people of St. Kilda what they thought about the matter; and, though they generally believed in destiny, they also believed, when the terms were explained to them, that they were free agents.[2] The Scotch school may have done real service in calling attention to the value of those instinctive judgments which precede a conscious reasoning process. This crude interpretation shows the ugly side of their creed; and does not, in any other respect, deserve a serious examination. Beattie is a really good writer, but he is simply the mouthpiece of the vague cry of alarm which went up from the ordinary mass of mankind as they became aware that acute thinkers were in some sense sapping the foundations of their creed. His book is an angry refusal even to listen to philosophical doubts, lest true religion should suffer. We must, he urges in one place, believe in testimony, for 'testimony is the grand external evidence of Christianity.'[3] Unluckily the argument was capable of inversion. An appeal to common sense was dangerous when common sense was the tribunal equally invoked by Tom Paine.

12. Beattie, in the 'Essay on Truth,' says that he wishes to defend the belief in God and in immutable morality. But he did not in this book apply his denunciations of philosophical scepticism to this purpose. The application had been made two years previously, in the first volume of Oswald's 'Appeal to Common Sense'—a book which it seems that Beattie had not seen.[4] Oswald is not a bad writer. His logical position illustrates the difficulty already noticed as pressing upon the Christian apologists. He sees very clearly that even the most victorious demonstrations of theological truth are dan-

[1] Essay, p. 43.
[2] Ib. p. 87.
[3] Ib. p. 246.
[4] See preface to later editions.

gerous, by the very fact that they are demonstrations. To make faith depend upon an elaborate structure of reasoning, however well constructed may be the syllogisms, is to make faith impossible for the bulk of mankind. Can subtle reasoning, he asks, satisfy men of sense on such points? And if the higher minds be satisfied, what is to become of the 'multitude who have neither leisure, nor capacity, nor inclination to pursue the same course?'[1] Clarke's 'demonstration' is a 'standing monument of great powers misapplied,'[2] and indeed an 'intemperate love of reasoning' is 'the epidemical distemper of the human mind.'[3] The admission that God's existence requires a proof, inflicts an injury which cannot be remedied by any apparent completeness in satisfying the demand.

13. Oswald would meet the difficulty by declaring that the existence of God is self-evident. The human mind is distinguished from the animal mind (although for a metaphysician he is singularly liberal to animal powers of reasoning[4]) by its capacity for intuitively recognising certain 'primary truths.' Oswald falls into hopeless confusion when attempting to put this doctrine into precise philosophical form. He, like Beattie, is one of the reasoners who thinks that Berkeley is refuted by the statement that 'corn, cattle, and linen' are 'realities;' and imagines that the good bishop first took up his theories 'in the purity of his heart and with a view to burlesque the refinement of infidels,' but was unluckily 'caught in his own trap.'[5] To this common confusion he adds a special power of confounding perception with inference and abstract with concrete truths. It is, he says, a 'primary truth' that 'fire has a power to consume combustibles,' and a 'secondary truth' that this piece of paper will be burnt if put into the fire.[6] The faculties which we share with the animals enable us to 'pronounce dogmatically that ink is black and milk white.' The faculty called common sense, by which rational beings are distinguished from animals and idiots, enables us to be equally certain about 'laws of nature.'[7] If Mr. Hume himself felt an electric shock, he would believe in electricity, even if other intelligent people may be 'void

[1] Oswald's Appeal, p. 6. [2] Ib. p. 150. [3] Ib. p. 58. [4] Ib. p. 176. [5] Ib. p. 96. [6] Ib. p. 370. [7] Ib. p. 239.

of all ideas of electricity.' And on precisely the same grounds a savage would infer the perfections of the Deity from the wonders of creation, as soon as the argument was suggested to him.[1] The obvious difficulty, that the very existence of unbelief proves that the argument cannot be so palpably evident, is met by the usual remarks about the 'sloth and habitual indulgence' of human beings,[2] and by denunciations of the intemperate love of reasoning; and Oswald also attempts, parenthetically, to point out the difference between mathematical axioms and truths about concrete facts.[3]

14. The argument, which it is unnecessary to examine further, simply amounts to indorsing the popular platitude, that an atheist must be a madman.[4] Whatever its weight, therefore, it could not be expected to have much influence with atheists. It is very natural to say, If you differ from me you must be a fool; and to evade the awkward necessity of proving a disputed point by declaring that doubt is simply impossible. The doctrine that we recognise the Deity as distinctly as we feel an electric shock should have landed Oswald in mysticism; but, in fact, he is a calm, practical Scotchman attacking a supposed assailant of morality and religion, by the readiest weapons at hand. As such, he probably represents pretty accurately the average state of mind of his contemporaries. They have simply resolved to disregard a philosophy which landed them in a mere quagmire of scepticism; and are labouring to give to a purely practical reply the airs of a metaphysical confutation. Perhaps, in the absence of any deeper solution, they took the best line open to them. The attempt to cast a bridge across the vast abyss of doubt had broken down, at once from its inherent weakness, and from the assaults of an undermining scepticism. Let us then declare that there is no abyss, and try whether absolutely ignoring the evil will not cure it.

15. A writer of a very different stamp resembles, but distances, Oswald in the audacity with which he plunges beyond his depth. Soame Jenyns appears to have been an amiable country gentleman, rather bigoted in his political tendencies, but not without acuteness and elegance of style. He could write

[1] Oswald's 'Appeal,' i. 222.
[2] Ib. i. 229.
[3] Ib. i. 382.
[4] Ib. i. 352.

pretty verses after the model of Prior; that he 'gave his days and nights to the study of Addison' was inferred from two or three papers contributed to the 'World;' and he is said to have been the charm of every social circle which he entered. He had been a deist in early life, but gave to the world the arguments to which he had owed his conversion in the same year (1776) as that in which Gibbon published his attack upon Christianity. This little treatise, called 'A View of the Internal Evidence of the Christian Religion,' is noticed with high praise by Paley, in his chapter 'on the Morality of the Gospel.'[1] In fact, it is an elegant statement of the familiar argument. The divine origin of Christianity is inferred from the purity and originality of its ethics. He accepts, and even exaggerates, the contrast often put forward by the deist between the pagan and the Christian morality. The characteristic virtues of the pagan world, such as valour, patriotism, and friendship, are declared to be 'false virtues;'[2] valour is an ambiguous quality, and patriotism and friendship but partial applications of universal love. Forgiveness, charity, repentance, faith, and humility are the characteristic virtues of Christianity; and Jenyns does not scruple to conclude that the most celebrated pagan virtues are more opposite to the spirit and more inconsistent with the creed of Christian morality than even 'their most infamous vices.' The tyrannicide of Brutus, and the suicide of Cato, did the world more harm than the profligacy of a 'Messalina or an Heliogabalus.'[3] The Christian doctrines, he admits, are not suited to the world, though they improve the world so far as they are accepted. Christianity is so superior to considerations of 'conquest, government and commerce, that it takes no more notice of them than of the battles of gamecocks, the policy of bees, or the industry of ants.'[4] Its 'incompatibility with the little wretched and iniquitous business of the world' is a proof of its divine origin. It is meant to purify the morals of mankind in general, and 'to select the most meritorious of them to be successively transplanted into the kingdom of heaven.'[5]

16. Relying upon this argument, Jenyns can afford to

[1] Paley's Works, iii. 213.
[2] Jenyns's Works, iv. 41.
[3] Ib. p. 59.
[4] Ib. p. 88.
[5] Ib. p. 90.

make light of the external evidences, and recognises the existence of a human element in the inspired writings with a freedom which gave rise to some suspicions of his sincerity. Some vagaries, such as a belief in the pre-existence of souls, which he avowed in some later 'disquisitions,' made his orthodoxy doubtful; but the suspicions seem to have been unfounded. Jenyns, in fact, is a rather curious example of the way in which cynicism may sometimes approximate to asceticism. A man of the world in the eighteenth century, he was little likely to be in real sympathy with the doctrines of à Kempis, or the early hermits. But, as a sound Tory, he was profoundly convinced of the general baseness of mankind, and uses language about the necessity in politics of 'violence, fraud, and corruption,'[1] which occasionally reminds us of Mandeville. Christianity, he sees, gives a code of morality different from that of the Walpoles, the Grenvilles, or the Wilkeses, and though it could not be well carried into practice, a belief in its authority proved at last a useful basis for the assault of the current maxims of his adversaries. In fact, his ascetic tendencies are sufficiently pronounced, not to suggest a retreat from the world or a systematic assault upon its evils, but to give an edge to the gentle social satire, popular in the 'Spectator' and its successors.

17. The argument, thus constructed, was well expressed, and called attention to an important side of the truth. At an earlier period, Jenyns had ventured further out of his depth, and never forgave the criticism to which his escapade had exposed him. In fact, the graceful essayist undertook to explain the origin of evil with such success as may be imagined. 'The true solution of this incomprehensible paradox,' he says, 'must be that all evils owe their existence solely to the necessity of their own natures; by which I mean they could not possibly have been prevented, without the loss of some superior good or the formation of some greater evil than themselves.'[2] God Almighty does his best; but he can only do what is possible. 'Our difficulties arise from our wrong notions of omnipotence, and forgetting how many difficulties it has to contend with.'[3] God's existence and supreme goodness are so evident, that they may be taken for granted, and

[1] Jenyns's Works, iii. 162. [2] Ib. iii. 37. [3] Ib. p. 99.

therefore all evil is somehow good. This simple-minded argument is expanded through six letters by the help of an adaptation of Pope's 'scale of beings,' to which are added the reflection that things which are imperfect could not be made perfect without being changed, and a few observations about evil frequently leading to good. That this trifling should ever have been taken for an argument is rather surprising; and, in fact, it is chiefly memorable now for having given occasion to Johnson's celebrated review. Johnson was no great metaphysician; but he was a moralist of too great depth and force to be imposed upon by such flimsy optimism. Whilst giving higher praise than can easily be justified to some of Jenyns's occasional remarks, he has little trouble in crushing the suggested consolations. His brief review is a weighty expression of the disgust with which a man of strong nature and sad experience of life rejects the pretentious consolation of sham philosophy. How comfort a soul, weary with unappreciated labour, and saddened by the loss of those nearest and dearest, by assuring him in verse or prose that

> There must be somewhere such a rank as man.

What to a man who has really known poverty, instead of looking at it from the windows of a family mansion, is the advantage of disguising its grim name under the alias 'want of riches,' and declaring that it 'gives more hopes and fewer fears' than wealth? 'There is yet another poverty,' answers Johnson, 'which is want of necessaries—a species of poverty which no care of the public, no charity of particulars, can preserve many from feeling openly and many secretly.'[1] The poor are insensible to some evils which torment the rich, 'but this happiness is like that of a malefactor who ceases to feel the cords that bind him when the pincers are tearing his flesh.'[2] With more generous indignation he rejects the argument, learnt by Jenyns from Mandeville, that those born to poverty should not be deprived by an improper education of the 'opiate of ignorance.' Johnson, though as stout a Tory as Jenyns, will not 'entail poverty upon generation after generation,' and hopes that the happiness of those whom education elevates may 'turn the balance against the exacerbation which

[1] Johnson's Works (edition 1806), vol. viii. 32. [2] Ib. p. 33.

the others suffer.'[1] 'I am always afraid,' as he nobly adds, 'of determining on the side of envy or cruelty;' he fears lest, under the appearance of salutary restraints, he may 'be indulging the lust of dominion, and that malevolence which delights in seeing others depressed.'[1] The roughest stroke of Johnson's satire is suggested by a whimsical speculation of Jenyns, to the effect that our sufferings may possibly provide for the pleasure of superior beings. Johnson suggests that such beings may perhaps 'catch a mortal proud of his parts,' and spoilt by flattery. They easily fill his head with idle notions, till they 'make their plaything an author; their first diversion commonly begins with an ode or an epistle, then rises perhaps to political irony, and is at last brought to its height by a treatise on philosophy. Then begins the poor animal to entangle himself in sophisms, and flounder in absurdity, to talk confidently of the scale of being, and give solutions which himself confesses impossible to be understood.'[2] Indeed, poor Jenyns's fantastic tricks might well make the angels smile.

### III. SCIENCE AND REVELATION.

18. Whilst speculation was thus avowedly rejected in the name of common sense, or took forms adapted to amuse the leisure hours of a fine gentlemen, historical theology showed little vitality. At such periods, the whimsical writers, in whom a lawless fancy supplies the place of sound reasoning and enquiry, come into the foreground; and a word or two may be spent in passing upon the school which, at the middle of century, represented the influence upon theology of the great University of Oxford, the source of so many theological movements. The 'Hutchinsonians,' to whom I refer, have a certain interest from their spiritual genealogy. John Hutchinson, the founder of the sect, had been an assistant of Woodward, one of the earliest enquirers into geology, and founder of the Cambridge professorship. A disagreement had arisen as to their claims to discovery, and Hutchinson, during the last years of his life (he died in 1737), had published his own system of philosophy. His chief work is called 'Moses's

[1] Johnson, viii. 36. [2] Ib. viii. 47.

Principia,' the name indicating that the authority of Moses is opposed to that of Newton. The 'scripture philosophy'—so it was called—fell into the hands of some young men at Oxford about the middle of the century, who thought that they had discovered in its dogmas a weapon for the confutation of rationalism. The sect, indeed, was not confined to Oxford. One of the earliest converts, as it seems, was Duncan Forbes, an eminent Scotch lawyer, whose thoughts on 'Religion' (published posthumously in 1750) are not without a certain impressive earnestness, though embodying many of Hutchinson's foolish fancies. Other Hutchinsonians were Julius Bate (1711–1771), and John Parkhurst (1728–1797), both of them Cambridge men, and both of them authors of Hebrew dictionaries of reputation[1]—their studies taking, as will be seen, the course naturally suggested by their philosophy. The chiefs of the sect at Oxford were George Horne, afterwards Bishop of Norwich; and William Jones, curate of Nayland in Suffolk. They were fast friends, and Jones commemorated his old companion in a biography, touching from the simple loyalty with which he cherishes the Bishop's reputation. The leading principles of the Hutchinsonian 'scripture philosophy' are summarised by Jones in a preface to the second edition of Horne's life. They deserve a moment's attention, only in so far as the crotchets of weak minds may indicate the general current of speculation.

19. The Hutchinsonians were combined in an extreme dislike for rationalism; in a fanatical respect for the letter of the Bible; and in an attempt to enlist the rising powers of scientific enquiry upon the side of orthodoxy. The founder of the sect appears to have shared the early forebodings generated in some minds by the Newtonian philosophy, and by the primitive teaching of geologists. The guesses of Woodward, Thomas Burnet, and Whiston, though far removed indeed from the conclusions of modern geologists, had suggested a risk to the authority of the book of Genesis, and Burnet had given scandal by an inclination to allegorise the first chapters. Newton's discovery of gravitation, again, had seemed in some

[1] Bate's 'Critica Hebra; or Hebrew-English Dictionary without Points,' appeared in 1767; Parkhurst's 'Hebrew and English Lexicon, without Points,' in 1762. It went through many editions.

degree to make the hypothesis of divine intervention superfluous. The Hutchinsonians, as Jones tells us, were much given to forming 'diligent collections of fossil bodies,' in order to prove the Flood. They were frightened by the doctrine of a vacuum, and would not allow that 'inert matter' could be capable of active qualities. Horne, in a pamphlet called 'A Fair, Candid, and Impartial State of the Case between Newton and Hutchinson,' declares a vacuum to be the 'absurdest of all doctrines;'[1] some 'ingenious divine,' it appears, had called a vacuum 'the sponge of all Atheism;'[2] whereas Hutchinson had expunged Atheism by demonstrating that gravitation was caused by a 'universal fluid,' pervading the ethereal spaces. These theories, inherited from an extinct metaphysical school,[3] were supplemented by a strange system of symbolism. By getting rid of the points, it was somehow possible to make the Hebrew Scriptures mean a great deal, which had occurred to nobody before the days of Hutchinson. Everything in nature and in the Bible could be made to testify to the truth of the Christian dogmas. The doctrine of the Trinity was proved by the analogy of fire, light, and air, which, it seems, are component parts of every concrete phenomenon; by Ezekiel's reference to the lion, the bull, and the eagle;[4] and by a variety of texts ingeniously combined in a 'hundred short arguments,' put together by Jones. All heathen mythology presented strange analogies to the mysteries of Christianity; Cerberus, for example, being a cherub in disguise; and the heathen systems generally had been constructed by 'purloining' fragments from 'the people of God,' though the true doctrine having been mixed by the stealers of 'Atheistical principles,' little is to be found now in the heathen teaching but 'their own filthy sediment.'[5] Jones's writings are chiefly a series of fanciful analogies for the confutation of infidels and the instruction of infants.

20. Armed with such weapons as these, Jones, who was a bitter high-churchman, went out to do battle against the open infidel and the still more dangerous and hateful race of disguised freethinkers, who, from Arianism, were rapidly

[1] Horne's Works, vi. 151. [2] Ib. vi. 153.
[3] See the same style of argument in Price's 'Dissertation on Providence,' sec. ii.
[4] Duncan Forbes, p. 148. [5] Jones's Works, i. 384.

developing into Unitarians. He cannot find words enough to express his contempt for the religion of nature, and he and his school generally represent an extreme and childish form of that dislike to the rationalist theology which was becoming the characteristic of the orthodox party. They had not yet learnt to appeal to the authority of the Church after the fashion of modern high-churchmen, and therefore endeavoured to shelter behind their queer mixture of crude science and strained allegorisation of scripture and nature. They had, however, as full a success as their descendants in opposing themselves to reason.

21. Horne, in his 'Letters on Infidelity,' ventured to attack the scepticism of Hume. His arguments, wherever they deviate into originality, are of course childish; and his most marked peculiarity is a tendency to personality and to petty facetiousness. He is very angry with Adam Smith's account of Hume's last moments; for the calmness with which the great philosopher met his end was contrary to all proper rules. His best witticism—I know not whether he was the first writer to give it currency—was the ironical proposal to omit the 'not' from the Commandments and place it in the Creed. That, he thinks, is a fair summary of Hume's philosophy.[1] The 'Letters on Infidelity' were published in 1784. His services to the Church, or his friendship with Jenkinson, first Earl of Liverpool, led to his elevation to the bench in 1788; but he died in 1791, leaving behind him a reputation for orthodoxy and amiability, but scarcely for intellectual vigour.

22. Leaving this little eddy of thought, we may return to the discussion upon miracles, which, since Hume and Middleton, occupied the ablest writers of the period. A few words may be first devoted to one curious episode in the controversy. Hugh Farmer, a popular dissenting preacher, brought up at Doddridge's celebrated academy, had published in 1761 an enquiry intended to show that the story of Christ's Temptation in the wilderness referred to a divine vision, not to an objective reality. This tolerably harmless theory produced some of the scandal generally attendant upon the devices by which the difficulties of a literal adherence to the Bible are

[1] Horne's Works, vi. 441.

ostensibly obviated with the practical result of making them more conspicuous. His argument led him to deny that the Devil could have performed a feat which would have been rightfully reckoned amongst the 'greatest miracles.'[1] Following out this line of speculation, he produced in 1771 a 'Dissertation upon Miracles.' His reasoning touches a gap in the ordinary controversies upon the subject, which neither party was much interested in discussing. Granting, in fact, that miracles could be proved, how did it follow that they were of divine origin? The intervention of superhuman power being admitted, it does not follow that the power must be infinite. Sceptics occasionally suggested this difficulty by way of throwing discredit on the general principle of an historical proof; but were more anxious to assert the absolute uniformity of the order of nature, whilst divines cared little for so fanciful a problem. To admit the truth of Christ's resurrection, and to deny the truth of his mission, implied a state of mind too exceptional to justify much examination. The question, however, turns up occasionally.[2] Bishop Fleetwood, in a quaint little treatise published in 1701, had maintained the thesis that God alone works miracles. He did not, indeed, deny the reality even of the heathen miracles, but put them in a lower class, as 'providential,' not 'evidential,' miracles; that is, as worked by God for some sufficient purpose, such as the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, but not to authenticate a previous claim to authority. Thus, without restricting the sphere of the miraculous, he tried to diminish its proving force; and, more recently, Chapman had ventured to define the limits of diabolic power. A devil, in his opinion, was certainly unable to raise the dead, nor was it likely that he could make a leg or an arm, or interfere with the motions of the heavenly bodies.[3] The acquaintance implied with the specific powers of devils seems to be excessive; and Farmer's solution was perhaps more satisfactory.

23. Farmer, like Middleton, illustrates the process by which

[1] 'Enquiry,' &c., p. 22.

[2] See, for example, Shaftesbury's 'Moralists,' part ii. sec. v.; Chubb's 'Discourse on Miracles;' Clarke's 'Evidences,' &c., ii. 698; Chandler, 'Discourse on Miracles,' pp. 18, 29; Sherlock's Works, i. 181; Prideaux's 'Letter to the Deists,' p. 113, &c.

[3] Chapman's 'Eusebius,' p. 844.

Protestant rationalism gradually developed into a wider scepticism. Middleton, as I have said, has been accused of stealing from a Protestant controversialist of the seventeenth century, and Farmer was charged with plagiarism from Le Moine, a French professor of theology at Leyden, who died in 1689. Middleton pushes back the date of miraculous intervention; Farmer, distinguishing by an adequate test the genuine from the spurious miracles, tries to narrow as much as possible the demands upon our faith. A genuine belief in miraculous agency is always accompanied by a belief in the frequency of its manifestations so vivid that the later sense of the word 'miracle' is almost unintelligible. The exceptions become the law. In the early ages of Christianity the natural world was supposed to be everywhere in contact with the supernatural; and to the popular mind there was no presumption against phenomena due to the interference of the two orders of existence. Diseases were explained by the action of evil spirits, and the only question about miracles was whether they were of divine or magical origin. During the ages of Catholicism a whole hierarchy of created beings, angelic, saintly, or diabolical, was a regular and acknowledged part of the machinery by which the world was administered. Farmer, who was apparently a man of considerable reading, saw, like Middleton, that the former prevalence of a belief in miraculous agency was not an argument for the objective reality of the alleged facts, but an explanation of the facility with which the stories obtained currency. Unwilling, however, to cut away the foundations of his own faith, by a sweeping application of this principle, he endeavoured to discover some means of limiting its operation. The result is a curious compromise, in which he alternately adopts the arguments of Hume and of his opponents. 'The visible world,' he says, 'is governed by stated general rules, commonly called the laws of nature.'[1] None but the lawgiver can dispense with the laws. Created beings, however superior to men, must be restrained within an appropriate sphere; and experience proves that the sphere is external to this world. Alleged cases to the contrary are met by Hume's argument. 'None,' he says, 'have ever yet attempted to show that any of the miracles in

[1] 'Dissertation on Miracles,' p. 2.

question are supported by an evidence superior to the natural improbability or absurdity of the facts themselves.'[1] This dangerous reasoning is, indeed, supported by some *a priori* observations on the inconveniences which would result if beings of less than divine nature were allowed to go about working miracles. If, for example, the Egyptian magicians had worked real miracles, the legitimate inference would have been that Moses was, at most, a stronger magician. This argument enables him to insist upon the vast importance of genuine miracles. Men, he urges, would be, and, indeed, ought to be, convinced by a miracle, even though it were worked on behalf of an apparently immoral doctrine. For if a miracle be an unequivocal proof of divine power, there can be no danger in exalting to the utmost its persuasive efficacy. The proof from miracles is thus made out to be 'decisive and absolute.'[2] Farmer, like the whole evidential school, imagines that, by isolating and removing to a distance the manifestations of divine power, he is really strengthening the evidence.

24. The old difficulty, however, of drawing the line affected Farmer as much as Middleton. His argument involved him in long disquisitions intended to meet supposed instances of diabolic agency.[3] The demoniacs of the New Testament were merely madmen or epileptics; and the heathen gods were not devils, as the fathers suppose, but deified spirits of dead men. Each of these theorems necessitated a fresh treatise to meet the assaults of opponents. In the discussion about the demoniacs, he followed the high medical authority of Mead, and had little trouble in proving the belief in *bonâ fide* devils as causes of disease to be a popular superstition. The task of showing that Christ and his apostles did not share the popular view, and that, for example, the devils of Gadara were a mere figure of speech, was a harder one, and brought him into conflict with various writers, including the universal champion, Warburton.[4] It is needless to follow the controversy, and equally needless

[1] 'Dissertation on Miracles,' p. 75. [2] Ib. p. 522.

[3] This discussion had been carried on at intervals, *e.g.* by Church, the opponent of Middleton. See his 'Vindication.' Lardner took the same view as Farmer.

[4] Warburton, x. sermon 27.

to set forth Farmer's views as to the origin of the heathen gods, and the manner in which they were regarded by St. Paul and the Hebrews. The discussion belongs to the antediluvian period of mythology, when a writer could seriously refer to the 'golden age' to explain an historical statement,[1] and speak of the humanity of 'Jupiter, Bel, and Osiris' as 'universally known.'[2] Farmer's arguments were answered by Fell, a dissenter, and Dr. Worthington, an Anglican clergyman; but I shall not attempt to remove the dust which has settled upon their pages. If here and there some pulpit orator cherishes a verbal belief in devils, the mode of thought which could give living interest to such discussions has utterly disappeared.

25. The difficulties in which Farmer's semi-rationalism landed him are exemplified by the main current of the controversy with Hume. Three treatises devoted to his refutation obtained a certain celebrity. Their authors were William Adams, afterwards master of Pembroke College, Oxford; John Douglas, afterwards Bishop of Salisbury; and George Campbell, afterwards Principal of Marischal College. Adams is introduced to us by Boswell as one whose intimacy with Johnson dated from the old college days, and seems to have been an amiable and cultivated man, whose literary efforts were chiefly confined to his assault upon the great sceptic. Douglas and Campbell were writers of greater eminence. Douglas exposed Lauder's attack upon Milton, and Bower's 'History of the Popes;' he wielded a serviceable pen in various political disputes; and, having witnessed the battle of Fontenoy as an army chaplain, was sufficiently qualified as a military critic to defend Lord George Sackville for his failure at Minden. He was a cultivated scholar, and is specially commended for the religious zeal which induced him, when 'not employed in the pulpit,' always to 'countenance public worship by his presence.' Campbell was one of the moderate divines in the Scotch Church, who substituted common-sense philosophy for the Calvinism of their fathers; and his claims to be a man of taste, as well as a theologian, are proved by his 'Philosophy of Rhetoric.' He endeavoured, moreover, to persuade the

[1] Farmer, p. 204. [2] Ib. p. 180.

Americans that they had no right to throw off their allegiance; but though 6,000 copies of a sermon for that purpose were distributed in the Colonies, they did not quiet the agitation. All three apologists were sound, solid, and respectable men, and had every right to be shocked at Hume's audacious attack upon the foundations of respectable beliefs. Though none of them were well qualified for metaphysical disputes, their arguments are interesting illustrations of the attitude taken up by the apologists imbued with the spirit of semi-rationalist theology. Equally averse to any belief in the continuous manifestation of supernatural agency, and to a denial of its former manifestation, they were exposed to two fires. They had at once to oppose Wesley and Hume; though Hume, of course, was for the time the most prominent in their thoughts; and the real problem was that which troubled Farmer—the discovery of a critical canon capable of being turned against enemies of either class.

26. Adams's 'Essay on Mr. Hume's Essay on Miracles' is, on the whole, a temperate and able statement of the ordinary and obvious reply. His arguments are substantially the same as those of Campbell, though more briefly and modestly expressed. Setting aside the common confusion about evidence and testimony, they come substantially to this, that an Almighty God can do what he pleases. Hume has shown that we cannot believe in an effect disproportionate to its cause; it is incredible that a physician should raise a dead man; for 'a force equal to two cannot produce an effect equal to two hundred.'[1] Hume, he supposes, took this for an argument against miracles; but the cause supposed in the case of miracles—namely, the divine power—is adequate to any effect; and, as there is no reason for doubting the probability of a divine interference for worthy purposes, there is no presumption against the Christian miracles. Adams argues, in short, as most apologists have argued before and since his time, upon the single issue of the credibility of miracles, considered apart from any general theory of the universe. Grant that there is no reason for disputing the existence of an invisible Supernatural Being, inclined to interfere in the world, and, of course, the argument against miracles becomes futile.

[1] Adams, p. 33.

But arguments, confined within these narrow limits, are convincing to those alone who are already at the writer's standpoint. The same weakness is inherent in all the answers to Hume, with the exception of Paley's, whose theory, as we shall see, really reposed upon a definite theology.

27. Campbell's book, which appeared in 1763, was long considered to be the ablest reply to Hume; and derives an additional interest from the fact that it led to a correspondence with Hume himself. Hume had early laid down the excellent principle that he would never answer an opponent; excellent, not only as a general rule of mental health, but from the want of any antagonists sufficiently on a par with him for profitable discussion. In this case, however, he so far deviated from his rule, as to write a letter to Campbell, marked by an admirable courtesy, and briefly stating his position.[1] In a few words he exposed the fallacy which runs through the most original parts of Campbell's argumentation. Campbell, in fact, rests his case chiefly upon a distinction which is palpably unphilosophical. He regards testimony and experience as independent sources of information. That 'testimony has a natural and original influence on belief antecedent to experience will,' he imagines, 'be easily conceded;'[2] his reason being that children believe before they have had any experience as to the value of testimony. It is, indeed, sufficiently obvious that the belief conceded to testimony is generally different from the belief which experience proves to be logically due to testimony. Hume, of course, admits that children believe their elders as naturally as a hammer makes 'an impression on clay.'[3] But the logical test of the true value of testimony must, as he further points out, be derived from experience, and experience alone. Testimony should be received just so far as we know by experience that witnesses speak the truth. Campbell, without explicitly denying this, infers a kind of vague logical test from the natural credulity of children. Testimony has a specific virtue, not to be resolved into, and therefore (as he tacitly assumes) not to be measured by experience. He meets Hume with the ordinary challenge, to assign grounds

[1] The letter is published in the preface to Campbell's book.
[2] Campbell, p. 29. [3] Ib. p. 12.

for our belief in the uniformity of nature. If Hume is unable to deny that this belief rests upon a primitive intuition, he must also (so the rather confused argument seems to run) admit that a belief in the truthfulness of mankind is a primitive intuition of co-ordinate authority. Such a vague doctrine disqualifies Campbell from discovering any general test of the value of evidence. How, in fact, can any testimony be confuted, if a belief in testimony be an elementary constituent of our logic? 'Principally,' replies Campbell, 'in one of two ways; by contradictory evidence, or by evidence discrediting the character of the witnesses.[1] This amounts to saying, except so far as the vague term 'principally' provides a loophole for evasion, that, in considering the probability of any statement, we are to discard from consideration the contents of the statement. We are bound to believe Livy equally, whether he asserts that an ox spoke, or that Hannibal crossed the Alps. We are, in fact, deprived of any independent criterion whatever of the value of historical evidence; and have thus opened a door wide enough to admit any prodigies whatever.

28. The most ingenious argument in defence of this paradox is one which Campbell borrowed from Butler, and which has since not unfrequently made its appearance.[2] The chances that a comet will not appear at a given instant in a given place are, as he says, infinite. The presumption against the statement is, therefore, as strong as experience can afford; and yet, when an astronomer announces the appearance of the comet, you unhesitatingly believe him. From this he infers that the evidence resulting from experience, 'even in the clearest cases, is acknowledged to be so weak, compared with that which results from testimony, that the strongest conviction built merely on the former may be overturned by the slightest proof exhibited by the latter.'[3] Hume would, of course, have replied that experience, and nothing but experience, justifies our belief in the astronomer's statement. The whole fallacy depends on a confused impression that the

[1] Campbell, p. 32.

[2] See Butler's Works, i. 211.

[3] Ib. i. 43. This argument is the substance of Whately's ingenious sophistry embodied in the 'Historic Doubts.' It is fully discussed in Mr. Venn's admirable 'Logic of Chance' (second edition), pp. 283, 360.

phrase 'there are infinite chances against an event' means here something more than this: 'We can conceive of an indefinite number of other events before the occurrence, and have no more reason for anticipating one than any other of such events.' So soon as we have any such reason, the anterior improbability disappears. Butler and Campbell have a confused notion that the improbability is an actual thing, which still exists, and is overcome by experience. It is merely a statement of our own ignorance; and the whole wonder is that knowledge begins when ignorance vanishes. Indeed, the argument would either prove that we should never believe anything—for the chances against any particular occurrence are infinite so long as we are in absolute ignorance; or else that we should believe everything—for no improbability is allowed any weight against any evidence. Neither conclusion would really suit Campbell. The same argument, expanded at greater length, forms the chief part of the fourth of Price's 'Dissertations.' Price decides [1] that the same evidence should be equally decisive in favour of the cure of a disease by medical or by miraculous agency—a logical result and a *reductio ad absurdum* of the argument.

29. Leaving this sophistry, however, Campbell is really blundering round a serious problem, to which Hume himself had given no satisfactory answer. Why, it is the great logical problem, does a single experience entitle us in some cases to predict the occurrence of some phenomena with absolute certainty, when, in other cases, multiplied experiences leave us in absolute uncertainty? What, to approach the problem from another side, is the difference between an event which is 'contrary to experience,' and an event which is not 'conformable to experience?' The distinction had been noticed, or, as Campbell puts it, 'artfully suggested,' [2] by Hume, and is obviously the very kernel of the argument. Campbell summarily meets it by the assertion that it is a distinction without a difference. He says that, on Hume's logic, no one ought to believe in the existence of a negro without having seen one; [3] and that, in fact, the private experience of each individual, unsupplemented by testimony, should be the measure of this belief. Laws of nature being

[1] Price's 'Dissertations,' p. 425. [2] Campbell, p. 54. [3] Ib. p. 49.

only revealed by experience, we have no more reason to believe that events will obey them, than that any other series of facts will be established by the same evidence. On Hume's showing, says Campbell, the new phenomena revealed by electrical investigations should be as incredible as the raising of the dead, to a man who has never witnessed either event. As it would be manifestly absurd to disbelieve in one of these cases, Campbell assumes that we ought to believe both, if established by the same evidence ; and, therefore, to evade incredulity as to miracles, substantially destroys the foundation of all inductive reasoning.

30. Hume's reply is remarkable. He says, 'I find no difficulty in explaining my meaning, and yet shall not probably do it in any future edition. The proof against a miracle, as it is founded on universal experience, is of that *species* or *kind* of proof which is full and certain when taken alone, because it implies no doubt, as is the case with all other probabilities ; but there are degrees of this species, and when a weaker proof is opposed to a stronger, it is overcome.'[1] Hume, for once, is not very clear ; but he is obviously pointing to a distinction, which is equally important whatever the metaphysical explanation of its nature. Campbell has been driven to accepting a hopeless branch of the dilemma. He has reduced the world to a mere jumble of incoherent phenomena, in which any event is as likely to happen as any other, and laws of nature have been abolished to prove that they may be transgressed. Some keener logic was required to meet the difficulty. The believer in supernatural interference must show not only that the interference takes place, but that it is supernatural, and is therefore as much concerned as his opponent in exhibiting the grounds of distinction between true and false miracles. Campbell, to ruin his enemy, cuts off the branch on which he is himself resting.

31. The remainder of Campbell's essay consists of the ordinary arguments in favour of miracles worked for religious purposes, and especially of miracles worked in opposition to the prevalent creed of the time, and therefore in face of prejudiced spectators. He still speaks of the Pagan, Mahommedan, and Romanist as the only religions in the world besides the

[1] Campbell, p. 12.

'religion of the Bible';[1] and urges that the miracle of the Creation must at least be admitted, whilst the Deluge is proved by shells dug from the bowels of the earth.[2]

32. The apologists thus assume the position that the truth of miraculous stories must depend exclusively upon the evidence alleged in each case. Having rejected the criterion suggested by Hume, which would have involved a denial of all miracles, they were still bound to find some means for disposing of the miracles alleged by their Catholic and 'enthusiastic' opponents. They could attack the evidence itself by discrediting or confronting the witnesses; and any gaps in the argument could be filled by the convenient, though unphilosophical, assumption, that we ought to believe in miraculous agency as little as possible. Philosophically speaking, their canons of evidence would seem to imply that there was really no meaning in the distinction between miraculous and unusual; an earthquake was no more miraculous than the standing still of the sun; but their practical unwillingness to accept the supernatural found expression in the rough popular application of the maxim, *Nec deus intersit.* God interferes occasionally; but it is reasonable to suppose, without troubling oneself too much about the logical grounds for the hypothesis, that he interferes as little as can be helped. And thus was constructed the sufficiently useful canon of historical evidence, that we are not to believe in a miracle when any other hypothesis will tolerably account for the facts. The application of this common-sense scepticism is best given in Douglas's 'Criterion,' which appeared in 1755. It is addressed to an unnamed correspondent, said to have been Adam Smith, who was Douglas's contemporary at Balliol. Douglas deals very briefly and feebly with the speculative part of the question. Proving or asserting that we may believe in a conjunction of effects and causes of which we have no actual experience, and remarking that an omnipotent God can do what he pleases, he conceives himself to have confuted his adversary. The historical part of his essay, however, is curious and well written; and illustrates the mode in which the orthodox writers sometimes changed swords with their opponents in the scuffle. Hume, agreeing with Middleton, had stated the evidence in favour of Vespasian's miracle and the Jansenist miracles as

[1] Campbell, p. 142. [2] Ib. p. 206.

strongly as possible, with the view, of course, of showing that no evidence could persuade us of the truth of such narratives. Douglas accepts the implied challenge by attacking the evidence for the most prominent pseudo-miracles. He condemns the miracles attributed to Loyola and Xavier as not having been published till long after the assigned date, in a distant country, without due examination, and as being incompatible with contemporary statements. The Jansenist miracles, again, were, for the most part, such cases of healing as could be explained by natural causes. He illustrates the singular influence of an excited imagination over physical processes by many curious cases. Such are the apparently well-authenticated stories of cures by the royal touch. Douglas had himself known one of the patients restored by Queen Anne;[1] and says that her sergeant-surgeon, Mr. Dicken, could testify to many others. It is indeed a rather curious illustration of the change in the general sentiment that, whilst Queen Anne still touched patients for the evil, Dr. Johnson amongst the number, poor Carte's history was ruined in 1747 by his avowal of a belief in the reality of the royal virtue; though it is true that his superstition was complicated with Jacobitism. Douglas further cites the cures effected by the stroker, Greatrakes, about 1662; the miracles of the French prophets; and similar cases recorded by medical authorities where no miraculous power was in question. Add the probability of imposture, as in the case of Januarius' blood, and we have abundant reason for rejecting all modern miracles.

33. How was it, we may ask, that Douglas was blind to the sceptical tendency of this argument? How could he fail to see that, in proving the Roman Catholic belief in the reality of miracles worked less than twenty-five years before[2] to be utterly without a foundation in fact, he was raising a strong presumption against the validity of the Christian miracles, worked under circumstances and resting upon evidence far less favourable to detection? The answer is partly that he was answering an infidel—the inference had indeed been expressly made by Bolingbroke[3]—and partly that his estimate of the

[1] Douglas, p. 203.

[2] The miracles were prohibited in 1731. Douglas's book appeared in 1755.

[3] Bolingbroke, ii. 323.

Christian evidence shows an almost infantile simplicity. He calmly observes, for example, that it would be 'extremely impertinent' in him to prove that the books of the New Testament are of the date assigned to them, and that 'what was never disputed by the enemies of Christianity in its earliest age, when opportunities and means of enquiry were to be had, would be denied with a very ill grace and with very little probability of success after 1700 years have elapsed.'[1] After which calm transference of the burden of proof, he gives the usual arguments for the competence and integrity of the witnesses to the Gospel miracles. Had Hume intentionally laid a trap for the orthodox, he might have congratulated himself on his success. Douglas's reasoning illustrates most completely the illusion under which the semi-rationalists attempted to banish from the world all supernatural agency but that which they favoured in absolute confidence in the impregnability of their case. After much hesitation, Douglas inclines to reckon Middleton amongst the imprudent defenders rather than amongst the lowest assailants of the Church.[2] That a similar imputation might be directed against himself obviously never entered his head.

34. It must be added, however, that another tacit assumption really blinded these apologists to the tendency of their arguments. The whole dispute about miracles really resolves itself into a dispute as to the nature of the universe. Without some coherent groundwork of theory the whole argument becomes hopeless. A simple investigation of logical methods cannot lead to any satisfactory canons of historical criticism. Before we can finally judge of the probabilities of a divine interference in any given case, or series of cases, we must show what independent reasons we have for believing in a being likely to interfere with the established order. The theory which men like Douglas and Campbell tacitly assumed met with a full exponent in the last great theological writer of the century. His writings belong to a considerably later period; but the general stagnation of speculative thought allows us to take him as the fullest representative of that form of theology which was dominant in England during the fifty years preceding the Revolution.

[1] Douglas, p. 282. [2] Ib. p. 413.

## IV. PALEY AND HIS SCHOOL.

35. Three men of marked ability, and with a strong family likeness, were nearly contemporary at Cambridge. John Hey was eighth wrangler in 1755; Richard Watson was second wrangler in 1759, and William Paley was senior wrangler in 1763. Hey became Norrisian Professor in 1780, and Watson became Regius Professor of Divinity, succeeding Rutherforth, in 1771. Though Paley never obtained a similar position, he lectured on ethics, metaphysics, and divinity, in Christ College, from 1767 to 1775. The names thus connected give a sufficient indication of the theological tendencies prevalent at the centre of English theological opinion, for Oxford was then at the very nadir of intellectual activity. Other indications of the spirit prevalent at Cambridge will meet us as we proceed. The system of education then pursued at the University had some merits, which have, perhaps, disappeared under more recent changes. Paley, we are told, and can believe, was an admirable lecturer.[1] He encouraged his pupils to discuss the principles which he laid down; and the subjects of instruction were wide, though the spirit in which they were studied was sufficiently narrow. Locke, followed by Clarke and Butler, was the chief authority in metaphysics; and Locke's 'Reasonableness of Christianity' and 'Paraphrase of the Epistles' were the main text-books in divinity. Public disputes on points of theology and metaphysics formed part of the exercises for a degree. Paley, for example, under the moderatorship of Watson, argued upon the possibility of reconciling the divine benevolence with the eternity of punishment, and appears to have been equally ready to take either side of the question. In 1762, as Watson tells us, there were disputations as to the foundation of the right of God over his creatures; as to fate and free-will; and as to the propriety of tolerating duelling and the liberty of the press.[2] Such arguments, amongst many other questions, however inadequately treated, might doubtless afford an excellent variety of mental gymnastics; though we may smile at Watson's prediction that learning would be ruined at Cambridge when the dinner hour

[1] See Life prefixed to Works, p. xi.

[2] Watson's 'Anecdotes,' i. 37.

was later than twelve, and the attendance on the two o'clock disputations diminished in consequence.

36. The starting-point of the Cambridge school may be illustrated by Bishop Law's 'Considerations on the Theory of Religion,' which was published in 1745, and reached a seventh edition in 1784. Law, who seems to have been an amiable and learned man, was the father of the first Lord Ellenborough ;[1] he was the patron of Paley, and the intimate friend of Blackburne. During many years he occupied a prominent place at Cambridge, being Master of Peterhouse and Professor of Casuistry. He may thus be reckoned as one of the leaders of that Cambridge school of which Paley was the chief product. A thoroughgoing disciple of Locke both in politics and theology, he was certainly not qualified to supply the defects of his master, and blunders when he tries to be original. His style, moreover, is heavy and confused, and, in the later editions at least of his book, long trailers of argument escape from the text and drag themselves through many ponderous notes. The book is, for the most part, a reproduction of the well-worn arguments in defence of the partiality of revelation. Law, however, gives to it a peculiar turn which deserves a moment's notice. He is a believer in the continuous progress of the race. He argues that the knowledge of natural and revealed religion has 'held pace in general with all other knowledge.'[2] Locke having swept away all innate ideas, and left to man nothing but a desire for happiness, it follows (so Law imagines) that all the beliefs which have since grown up in the human race have been the result of a gradual education. Mankind have been left at liberty to 'form and dispose of each other,'[3] the wisdom of the arrangement being obvious from the consideration that the possession of innate ideas would have made them in some sense necessary agents. It is, of course, easy to prove that in each stage of the world, the antediluvian, the patriarchal, the Jewish, and the Christian, they have had such communications made to them as they were fitted to receive at the time. The metaphysical feebleness implied in such an argument is connected with a

[1] This relationship led to a curious scene in the well-known trial of Hone by Ellenborough.

[2] Law's 'Considerations,' p. 237. [3] Ib. p. 11.

childlike acceptance of the literal truth of the Scripture narrative. He holds, for example, with Cumberland, that Adam could always have proved to his descendants that he was the first man from the absence of a navel.[1] But, feeble as was Law's speculative ability, and narrow as his critical knowledge, he is attempting in a crude fashion to strike out that theory of education of the race which, in abler hands, has played a conspicuous part in later theology. He sought, in fact, to reconcile theology with science, by admitting that beliefs might be developed by a gradual process, instead of springing full-blown and perfect into the world. The primitive man is with him so far from being the man of the metaphysical writers with the law of nature nobly marked upon his consciousness, that he regards savages as incapable of receiving Christianity with any good effect.[2] He thus escapes from Dodwell's dilemma by admitting that Christianity is founded on argument, but denying that Christianity is universally necessary, and allowing some good in other forms of religion.[3] Law's desire to reconcile Christianity to scientific views led him to adopt another tenet, which caused some scandal. He revived the old theory as to the 'sleep of the soul' after death. The meaning of this odd crotchet was, that he absolutely rejected the value of 'ontological disquisitions,'[4] and refused to believe that the existence of an immaterial substance distinct from the body could be demonstrated by the natural reason. He was anxious to make this doctrine, like all others, depend upon the evidence of miracles, not upon *a priori* reasoning; and the tendency, as we shall see, was characteristic of the whole school to which he belonged.

37. Watson, like Law, came from the North country, and was a typical specimen of the sturdy breed which has often shown its intellectual prowess at Cambridge examinations. Paley, though born at Peterborough, was brought up from infancy at Giggleswick, in the wild hill district of Craven. Mathematical studies have long been cultivated in that part of the country, and Paley shows everywhere that masculine, but rigid, intellect which finds its natural element in mathematical study. He is the very type of the clear and receptive, rather

[1] Law, p. 62.
[2] Ib. p. 29.
[3] Ib. p. 34.
[4] Ib. p. 438.

than originative, reasoners who are predestined to success in competitive examinations. His admirable lucidity and his shrewd sense extort our admiration, even whilst we perceive his blindness to the loftier aspects of religious thought. His deficiencies fitted him to be the exponent of the frigid theology of his time; and we, children of the twilight, are too often unjust to the man who loves the broad prosaic daylight and resolutely clears his mind of fog.

38. Of Paley's chief works, the 'Moral and Political Philosophy' was published in 1785; the 'Horæ Paulinæ,' his most acute and original book, in 1790; his 'Evidences of Christianity' in 1794; and his 'Natural Theology' in 1802. Paley died in 1805. Though his last work falls beyond the limits of this book, I shall speak of it as the best expression of the theological theory which underlies all the teaching of the previous period, and as essential to a due estimate of Paley's position. Paley himself claims to have formed his works into a system. He has given 'the evidences of natural religion, the evidences of revealed religion, and an account of the duties that result from both.'[1] The 'Natural Theology' thus lays the basis of the whole structure. The book, whatever its philosophical shortcomings, is a marvel of skilful statement. It states, with admirable clearness and in a most attractive form, the argument which has the greatest popular force and which, duly etherialised, still passes muster with metaphysicians. Considered as the work of a man who had to cram himself for the purpose, it would be difficult to praise its literary merits too highly. The only fault in the book, considered as an instrument of persuasion, is that it is too conclusive. If there were no hidden flaw in the reasoning, it would be impossible to understand, not only how any should resist, but how anyone should ever have overlooked the demonstration.

39. The argument is familiar, and probably has been familiar since the first days when it occurred to anyone to provide a logical basis for theology. Paley himself calls it 'not only popular but vulgar.'[2] The most popular version at the time was probably Derham's 'Physico-Theology.'[3] The

[1] Works, iv. vii. [2] Ib. iv. 280.

[3] It is the substance of the Boyle Lectures for 1711–2, and anticipates some

illustration with which Paley's book opens gives the whole reasoning. From a watch we infer a watchmaker.[1] From natural contrivances we should, by the same reasoning, infer a divine artisan. The whole treatise is an accumulation of instances illustrative of this theorem. In summing up his argument, he notices, as the most impressive cases, 'the pivot upon which the head turns, the ligament within the socket of the hip joint, the pulley or trochlear muscles of the eye; the epiglottis, the bandages which tie down the tendons of the wrist and instep, the slit or perforated muscles at the hands and feet, the knitting of the intestines to the mesentery, the course of the chyle into the blood, and the constitution of the sexes as extended throughout the whole of the animal creation.'[2] Each of these cases is decisive by itself; the cumulative effect should make doubt impossible; and no other solution can be offered than that which he accepts.

40. Paley's reasoning shows a complete unconsciousness of the metaphysical difficulties which might be suggested. Kant's 'Critique of Pure Reason' had appeared in 1781, and straggling notices of his works were already penetrating into England.[3] Coleridge, the interpreter of Germany to England, was thirty years old; but Paley was beyond the pale. To Hume's arguments on the same topic he makes no allusion; and Spinoza, it may be assumed, was for him the traditional atheist. To all such matters, the commonplace English mind, which he so faithfully represented, was profoundly indifferent. We see, however, symptoms of a nervousness as to the germs of the scientific theory of evolution, which, in our

of Paley's illustrations, though with greatly inferior knowledge. Ray's 'Wisdom of God manifested in the Works of Creation' (1691) was a similar book of great popularity.

[1] This illustration of the watch had become a commonplace long before Paley made it his own. He probably adopted it from Tucker, 'Light of Nature,' i. 523, ii. 83. It may be found in many previous writers; *e.g.* Bolingbroke, Works, iii. 188; Blackmore's 'Creation' in Chalmers's 'English Poets,' x. 353; in Clarke's Works, i. 6; and in Burnet's 'Sacred Theory of the Earth,' book i. ch. iv. Hallam, in the 'Literature of Europe,' ii. 385, gives references to Herbert's 'De Religione Gentilium,' cap. xiii.; Nieuentyt's 'Religious Philosopher' (English translation, 1730), preface, p. xlvi.; Hales's 'Primitive Origination of Mankind,' and traces it to a curious passage in Cicero, 'De Natura Deorum,' ii. 34.

[2] Ib. p. 352.

[3] The first publication about Kant is said to have been 'A General Introductory View,' by Nitsch; London, 1796. Other books appeared in 1798.

day, opposes the greatest difficulty to the argument. Part of the book is levelled against Buffon's 'organic molecules;'[1] and against the new Lamarckian theory of appetencies,[2] whilst we already find the name of Darwin connected with a supposed contrivance for the growth of seeds.[3] He finds it necessary, moreover, to meet the explanation 'sometimes attempted to be given,' 'that the parts were not intended for the use, but that the use arose out of the parts.'[4] Already, in fact, there was dawning the conception of the influence of conditions of existence to supplant that of supernatural contrivance; and biology, like geology, was dimly threatening to break the old alliance with theology; yet the danger was hardly perceived. Paley, for example, can still insist upon the curious coincidence that animals require sleep, whilst night brings about a periodical silence.[5] That the night should be the condition which produced the periodical rest has obviously never occurred to him. Thus, unsuspicious of possible assaults, Paley is content to rest his whole case upon the argument from contrivance. The old ontological argument, so popular in the preceding generation, is not even mentioned. Clarke, as we have seen, was still discussed in the schools; but his weapon rests in the armoury, and is not produced for practical warfare. That method of reasoning had fallen into utter desuetude. The acuteness of Hume had scarcely been appreciated by his English contemporaries; and thus the argument for natural religion, like the argument for revealed religion, is exclusively the argument from facts.

41. Let us enquire, then, what was the natural complement to reasoning of this kind. The doctrine of final causes implies a more or less refined anthropomorphism. It assumes that we may attribute to the Divine Being purposes and thoughts more or less resembling our own. According to Hume's profound remark, the savage infers God from the apparent interruptions of order, and the philosopher from order itself. The savage hears God's voice in thunder, and traces his handiwork in prodigies; the philosopher

[1] Paley, iv. 280.

[2] Ib. p. 283. Lamarck's 'Système des Animaux sans Vertèbres,' in which the doctrine was first mentioned, appeared in 1801.

[3] Ib. p. 236. [4] Ib. p. 44, and ch. v. [5] Ib. p. 195.

becomes conscious of a divine power in the force which whirls the planets in their orbits and determines the fall of an apple. Paley's theology is intermediate between these poles. God the thunderer is too childish, God the wielder of all forces too abstract, a conception for him. He cannot believe in a deity whose interference is capricious, nor in a deity of whom nature is the living raiment. But, as a compromise, he can accept God the contriver, sufficiently human to interfere, and yet sufficiently divine to interfere upon fixed principles. It is in the borderland where we can detect specific action upon the world, but yet action of a regulated intelligence, that we can detect the divine workman. God has been civilised like man; he has become scientific and ingenious; he is superior to Watt or Priestley in devising mechanical and chemical contrivances, and is, therefore, made in the image of that generation of which Watt and Priestley were conspicuous lights.

42. This anthropomorphism comes out curiously in incidental expressions. The arrangement of the 446 known muscles, crossing, perforating, and enveloping each other, must have required 'meditation and counsel.'[1] God must have been decidedly more ingenious than Watt. The problem of making reptiles, he says, may be thus stated: 'Muscular action and reciprocal contraction and relaxation being given, to describe how such animal might be constructed, capable of voluntarily changing place. Something, perhaps, like the organisation of reptiles might have been hit upon by the ingenuity of an artist, or might have been exhibited in an automaton by the combination of springs, spiral wires, and weights; but to the solution of the problem would not be denied, surely, the praise of invention and successful thought; least of all would it ever have been questioned whether intelligence had been employed about it or not.'[2] Had there been a competitive examination for the construction of the best form of reptile, the Almighty artisan would have had every chance of carrying off the prize.

43. Ingenuity implies limitation. To state a problem is to impose conditions upon the power of the artist; and contrivance is most clearly displayed where the greatest

[1] Paley, iv. 84. [2] Ib. p. 191.

effect is produced with the worst materials. And hence arises a difficulty which Paley recognises, and endeavours to meet; even at the price of apparently admitting that the God, whose infinite skill he demonstrates, is not the supreme ruler, but a God working under conditions imposed by a superior.[1] The problem of creation had been stated by somebody, 'attraction and matter being given, to make a world out of them,'[2] and Paley is willing to accept the statement. It follows from such a mode of approaching the question that the argument not merely imposes limitations upon God, but is strongest where the limitations are most narrow. We have not, Paley says, a knowledge of the chemical parts of our framework, similar in kind or degree to our knowledge of the mechanical part; and thus the evidence drawn from the gastric juice, though still capable of supplying 'an argument in a high degree satisfactory,'[3] is inferior to the evidence drawn from the construction of an arm. The instincts, again, are more conclusive than the reason. He remarks, for example, that he never sees a bird confined to her nest 'as close as if her limbs were tied down by pins and wires,' and yet confined only by an internal sensation, without recognising 'an invisible hand detaining the contented prisoner from her fields and groves, for the purpose, as the event proves, the most worthy of the sacrifice, the most important, the most beneficial.'[4] If, by some mechanical arrangement, 'pins and wires' of living flesh had fastened the incubating bird, the case would have been more decisive as approximating to the ingenious arrangement which enables fowls to roost by closing their claws when they bend their legs.[5] It is the 'undesigned coincidence' which startles him. The absence of design in the bird proves its presence in the creator. It is that quality in the animal world which resembles a self-acting apparatus in human contrivances, upon which Paley dwells exclusively, and which, indeed, forms his sole proof of creative energy. Thus the argument collapses where we might expect it to be strongest; the existence of reason is a slighter proof of the Creator than the existence of instinct; and a chemical operation less striking than a

[1] Paley, iv. 27.
[2] Ib. p. 28.
[3] Ib. p. 55.
[4] Ib. pp. 209, 210.
[5] Ib. p. 137.

mechanical contrivance. One other remark may be made in passing. The argument involves the ignoring of the transmission of hereditary influences, and here, as in very similar moral questions, involves also the fallacies which result from considering the individual apart from the race. The scepticism which had destroyed the old theological synthesis left individuals as independent fractions instead of parts of an organic whole. Thus the question of origins, unsolved in the scientific sense, left a field for the display of mysterious energies, which were no longer recognised as operative in the normal conduct of affairs.

44. The deity thus conceived is obviously a part, almost a material part, of the universe. He has to make the world out of the materials provided for him, though, verbally, he may be supposed to have provided them for himself. Paley almost seems to think that, if we had more senses, we might perceive him directly, and thus escape the great difficulty, which is that 'no man hath seen God at any time.'[1] Kant remarks that the argument from final causes involves a logical leap. Looking back along the series of phenomena as far as we please, we come to nothing but phenomena; and must, therefore, make a sudden spring from the phenomenal to the transcendental, or limit ourselves to an anthropomorphic deity. Paley declines to make the spring. His God exists in time and space. A scientific induction, as he seems to imagine, would prove that at some time or other, a being of indefinite power took rude lumps of matter in his hands, rolled them into balls, and sent them spinning through space. So tremendous a catastrophe requires to be moved to as great a distance as possible; but it is not to be removed altogether out of time. Place your creative impulse at any distance you please, at six thousand or sixty million years, and Paley's God stands for the aggregate of the preceding forces. Since that date, the field is open as widely as possible to the researches of science; before it everything is hid in a mystery, which we call God. Paley is content, so long as we admit that it happened some time or other; and would allow men of science to push it as far off as possible. This curious compromise, therefore, admits for a brief period of reconciliation

[1] Paley, iv. 269.

between science and theology. God, indeed, has all but become an object of scientific investigation; had we but a sixth sense, we might expect actually to detect him in the act of creating; and yet science may investigate the working of the machinery, instead of its original construction, without risk of meeting the supernatural. The man of science may examine the functions, though he cannot enquire into the origin of the organs; and, similarly, the historian may trace the drama of history, conscious that Providence will not interfere in the piece, though it may originally have distributed the parts.

45. I shall speak elsewhere of Paley's moral philosophy. His 'Evidences of Christianity' gives the application of his doctrines to the problem which had been now so long under discussion. Like his other books, it is a model of clear and coherent statement. To originality he makes no pretences; and yet he gives so able a summary of the apologetic argument, that his book has almost the force of novelty. His main authority is the excellent Nathaniel Lardner, a writer always mentioned respectfully by the orthodox divines, though he stammered a little over their shibboleth. The result of many years' painful research was given in Lardner's 'Credibility of the Gospel History,' the five volumes of which appeared at intervals from 1727-1743. The general design of the book is to corroborate the New Testament from independent sources. Paley had but to select and polish the weapons provided in this antiquarian armoury. He is perfectly candid in avowing his obligations, which suggest one curious fact. Lardner was substantially arguing against Collins and Woolston; and Paley's summary of his results is still the text-book at Cambridge; so that the students of that ancient University are still carefully prepared to meet the assaults of the deists so often pronounced to have been extinguished a century ago. In Lardner, the argument, doubtless, produced genuine conviction; to Paley they, at least, afforded a sufficient excuse for accepting the established creed of the time. We need not enquire what is their effect upon modern readers.

46. Paley is of course an advocate, and not above an advocate's arts. He proves, with superfluous energy, what nobody disputes; glides gently over weak places; and gives

to admissions the air of confident assertions. The argument, however, if his fundamental assumptions be granted, is sound enough. His reply to Hume may be compressed into a sentence; and embodies the essential consideration, without those superfluous refinements in which Campbell and Adams had lost themselves. 'Once believe that there is a God,' says Paley, 'and miracles are not incredible.'[1] Amend the statement by saying 'such a God as is asserted in the natural theology,' and the argument is invincible. Experience—the only test admitted by Hume and by Paley—might conceivably inform us that this world was constructed and regulated by such an invisible agent as Paley postulates. Hume had really based his argument on the further statement, that we have no reason for believing in such a God. Paley assumes as a fundamental proposition the very theorem which Hume denies—namely, that we have good grounds for belief in an 'intelligent Being,' who may conceivably wish to inform us of certain facts. The contriver who at one period put together an arm of flesh and blood, at another period contrived an ingenious means of communication with his creatures; the watchmaker shows his continued skill and activity by making his clock strike in an unprecedented manner. As the 'beneficent provision' of rain proves a divine contriver, though many regions are left barren, so the beneficent provision of a revelation proves the divine lawgiver, though many nations are left in heathen darkness.[2] The contrivance once put together, and the religion once revealed, God interferes no more. 'The seed being sown was left to vegetate; the leaven being inserted was left to ferment, and both according to the laws of nature; laws, nevertheless, disposed and controlled by the Providence which conducts the affairs of the universe, though by an influence altogether inscrutable and generally undistinguishable by us. And in this Christianity is analogous to most other provisions for happiness. The provision (is) made, and being made, is left to act according to laws which, forming part of a more general system, regulate this particular subject in common with many others.'[3] Once, in short, 'fix upon our minds the belief of a God' (of this sort) 'and after that all is easy.'[3]

[1] Paley, iii. 6. [2] Ib. p. 384. [3] Ib. p. 408.

47. The process is easy and coherent. From the ingenuity displayed in the watch we first infer the maker, and then when any unexpected movement takes place, we may assume that the maker is at work. He alone can possess the key which governs its motions. As, again, Paley finds God in nature by help rather of small contrivances than of the general order, so he finds God in religion less from the intrinsic excellence of the doctrine than from the disturbance due to a sudden shock in the working of the machinery. The end to be gained is in his mind sufficient—namely, the revelation of the dogma which with him is the keystone of all morality. The purpose of the Christian religion, he tells us, is to establish 'the proof of a future state of rewards and punishments.'[1] It was meant to supply 'motives and not rules, sanctions and not precepts.'[1] Other articles of the Christian faith are 'only the adjuncts and circumstances of this.'[2] The Christian morality, indeed, receives the conventional tribute of praise, partly borrowed from Soame Jenyns; but he points out that here there can be no novelty. Morality being simply a system of rules for the promotion of public happiness, the effect of actions may be calculated and rules framed by experience; and hence a divine revelation would be, strictly speaking, superfluous.[3] The essence of Christianity is simply the assertion of a fact. Christ came to tell us that we should go to hell if our actions did not tend to promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number; and the Almighty has contrived a means for giving him satisfactory credentials. The man at whose order the clock strikes thirteen must be in the secret of the artificer, and we may trust his account of a hidden part of the machinery. Paley's argument is, therefore, exclusively directed to the proof of certain facts. 'The truth of Christianity depends upon its leading facts, and upon them alone.'[4] The miracles were for the original converts the convincing, and indeed the sole, arguments; 'they who acted and suffered in the cause acted and suffered for the miracles; for there was no anterior persuasion to induce them, no prior reverence or partiality to take hold of. Jesus had not one follower

[1] Paley, iii. 211.
[2] Ib. p. 407.
[3] Ib. p. 212.
[4] Ib. p. 400.

when he set up his claim. His miracles gave birth to his sect.'[1] To prove then that a catastrophe interrupted for a moment the order of nature is the essence of Paley's argument; and admitting, as on his view we must admit, that there is no *a priori* incredibility in such an event, we must further grant that Paley states his case forcibly, and with a breadth of view not common in apologists.

48. Adopting from the ordinary stock-in-trade of Christian advocates the theory that the early preachers died in attestation of a certain story, and condensing from Lardner a considerable mass of testimony to the authenticity of the original documents, Paley succeeds in proving what no one would now dispute. He proves, that is, that the early preachers told a story involving a miraculous element, and substantially identical with that which we now possess. To the ordinary arguments in defence of his position he had already added one of singular elegance and originality in the 'Horæ Paulinæ.' That book may be quoted as the best proof of his sincerity; for its reasoning, though defective in places, is so skilfully arranged that we can hardly doubt its effect upon the reasoner. It leaves, indeed, like the 'Evidences,' one important step before his conclusion can be reached; unluckily this was just the step which, from his point of view, was the easiest, whilst from ours it is the most insurmountable. Paley, in fact, assumes that the belief in the miraculous was not the result, but the efficient cause, of the disciples' zeal. Had they not believed, as he says with a certain *naïveté*, they might have lived quietly and comfortably by simply not bearing witness to a falsehood. Could men, he asks, 'go about lying to teach virtue; and, though not only convinced of Christ's being an impostor, but having seen the success of his imposture in his crucifixion, yet persist in carrying it on, and so persist as to bring upon themselves for nothing, and with a full knowledge of the consequences, enmity and hatred, danger and death?'[2] Obviously, the hypothesis is absurd. Though an allusion or two is made to the old alternative of 'enthusiasm,' Paley scarcely contemplates any serious answer except the suggestion of forgery.[3] If, we may say, the Apostles told the same story which we now have, they must

[1] Paley, iii. 180. [2] Ib. p. 169. [3] *E.g.* pp. 258 and 267.

either have believed it or lied enormously. If they believed, their belief must have been founded on actual evidence, or determined by some strong predisposition to the doctrine. Paley scarcely takes this last hypothesis into account, because he naturally attributes to the Apostles his own view, that the miraculous interference, and not the doctrine, was the essence of their teaching. Granting this, and excluding all presumption against the miraculous, we may assume his conclusion to be reasonable. He just touches, indeed, an argument which might have led him further. He accounts for the incredulity of the Jews by the remark that the belief in demons was then so common as to afford an easy explanation of unusual phenomena.[1] He fails, however, to notice the bearing of this remark upon his own argument, and it must be admitted that the failure is suspicious.

49. The most curious passage as an illustration of his point of view is perhaps that in which he accounts for the failure of later missionaries. 'They have piety and zeal;' they have greater learning and education relatively to their disciples; their religion is equally superior to those by which it is confronted; why do they not succeed? The only difference is that Christ and his Apostles had 'means of conviction which we have not; that they had proof to appeal to which we want.'[2] The assumption that conversions are effected by argument, and that the only satisfactory argument is a power of working miracles, is characteristic of Paley's theory of the genesis of religion. Meagre as it appears to modern thinkers, it is more or less involved in every conception of a supernatural revelation.

50. Finally, I may notice that Paley's omissions are as significant as his assertions. With the instinct of a dialectician, he masses his forces upon crucial facts, and refuses to be drawn into the detached fights where victory is to be won only at the price of complex combinations. He is content to give up much as irrelevant, and without disavowing the orthodox assumptions, tacitly regards them as superfluous. He all along assumes, for example, that the books of the New Testament are to be treated by the ordinary canons of historical evidence. He makes assumptions quite incompatible

[1] Paley, iii. 358 to 363. [2] Ib. p. 331.

with a belief in verbal inspiration. When, for example, he argues that a discrepancy amongst the Evangelists no more affects their credibility than a discrepancy between Clarendon and Burnet as to the date of Argyle's execution is a reason for doubting the facts,[1] he assumes that the Evangelists may contradict each other on details, and implicitly gives up the concordance-writers. He explicitly asserts again that the Apostles confirmed the doctrines received by revelation by arguments and illustrations drawn from their own minds.[2] This remark, insignificant in itself, leads to an important peculiarity of Paley and his school.

51. Was Paley, it has sometimes been asked, perfectly sincere? I venture to believe that he was. So far as one human being can speak with any approach to confidence of the thoughts not open to his direct inspection, and, it may be, not very distinct in the consciousness of the thinker, I believe that Paley was honestly convinced by his own reasonings. I can believe it the more easily because the acceptance of his conclusions involved so slight a strain upon his imagination. Paley's natural theology does not imply the acceptance of a principle which is to meet us at every turn and modify all our conceptions, but simply an admission that certain events occurred a long time ago. The series of phenomena seen by the light of his dogma do not receive a new organic unity; it is only that the first terms of the series are modified. The existence of God becomes, as it were, a question for antiquarians, but the problem may be disregarded when we are investigating the actual government of the world. Contemporary lawyers settled the British Constitution without enquiring into the history of Hengist and Horsa; and Paley's theology had little more reference to the interests of the day than the early legends of British history to the relations of George III. to his Parliament. There is therefore no difficulty in giving Paley credit for a belief that the death and resurrection of Christ were as well proved as the main facts about Julius Cæsar. One set of statements might be accepted as easily as the other, for the acceptance or rejection of either would involve no serious modification in his conceptions of the universe.

[1] Paley, iii. 347. [2] Ib. p. 353.

52. If, however, Paley was so far sincere, some of the dogmas of his professed creed must certainly have sat very loosely upon him. His methods of reasoning lead naturally to the Unitarianism which presents the nearest approach to a systematic evolution of opinion in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Controversies about the Trinity preceeded and accompanied the controversy with the deists. The passage from Christianity to Deism involves the attempt to banish mystery from theology, and to replace the God of revelation by the God of mathematical demonstration. 'Where mystery begins religion ends' is the phrase attributed by Bolingbroke to Foster; and the sentiment is at least characteristic of the school. The Arianism of Clarke, Whiston, and their followers was the result of an attempt to reconcile Christian dogma to the *a priori* mode of reasoning; for it was manifestly impossible to demonstrate the Supreme Three in One by pure reasoning. In the later half of the century a similar difficulty presented itself to the writers who approached the question from a different side. The truth of religion rested on the proof of certain facts. Now historical evidence might be admitted to bear the weight of a series of events brought about by supernatural agency; but could it bear so tremendous a burden as the Incarnation of God? Evidence might prove that Christ suffered and rose again; it could hardly prove that Christ was God Almighty. The more the historical view became prevalent, in however crude a shape, the more impossible it became for the imagination to interpolate so tremendous a term into an otherwise natural series of events. The more it was attempted to place the Gospels in the same rank with the histories of Tacitus and Thucydides, the more difficult it became to conceive of Christ as differing in nature from the heroes of Greek and Roman history. In the earlier period metaphysicians invented Arianism by rejecting the theory that God could possibly be man; in the later period evidence-writers invented Unitarianism by destroying the fancy that man could be God. The discussion in both cases led to much fencing with texts, now utterly uninteresting to all reasoning beings; but the general tendency is sufficiently clear.

## V. THE SUBSCRIPTION CONTROVERSY.

53. Unitarianism showed itself both amongst churchmen and dissenters. In the previous generation, Lardner became a Socinian, Watts was inclined to Arianism, and Doddridge, who taught the most celebrated dissenting academy, was at one time himself inclined to heresy, whilst many of his pupils subsequently became Unitarians. In the last half of the century, Unitarianism became the prevailing creed of the most intelligent dissenters. Within the borders of the establishment the same tendency was manifest. The theology of Paley, Hey, and Watson is only nominally Trinitarian, and their orthodoxy may, with little want of charity, be imputed to the fact that they attached too little importance to their dogmas to care for a collision with the Thirty-nine Articles. There were, however, some men of more tender conscience, of whom some, such as Lindsey, Wakefield, Jebb, Disney, and Evanson seceded from the Church, whilst others endeavoured to break the galling fetters of subscription. Of these last the leading spirit was Francis Blackburne. The discussion of which his 'Confessional' was the chief result had been simmering since the middle of the century. Robert Clayton was a disciple of Clarke's, with whom he had formed a friendship just before the philosopher's death, and by whom he had been presented to Queen Caroline. Her favour, aided by the influence of Lady Sundon, advanced him to an Irish bishopric in 1730. In the year 1751 appeared a strange book called the 'Essay on Spirit,' of which he was either the genuine or the adopted father.[1] The object of this book was to set forth a strange kind of metaphysical fetichism. Every particle of active and attractive matter, it seems, has a spirit united to it to direct its movements.[2] The whole universe is thus replete with spirits. God governs through this vast hierarchy of subordinate beings,[3] of which Christ or the Logos, who is identified with Daniel's Archangel Michael,[4] is the head. In a dedication to the primate, the author admits that his opinions

[1] See Chalmers's 'Biog. Dict.'
[2] 'Essay on Spirit,' p. 11.
[3] Ib. p. 85.
[4] Ib. p. 75.

do not quite coincide with those of the compilers of the Articles and the Liturgy; but argues that it his duty neither to submit to the authority of the Church, nor to secede from every institution marked by human imperfection.[1] He therefore concludes to express his sentiments, in a dress not calculated to disturb the minds of the vulgar, hoping that the constituted authorities will redress his grievance, and especially that they will get rid of the Athanasian Creed. In 1756 Clayton tried to carry his principles into effect by moving in the Irish House of Lords for an omission of the Athanasian and Nicene Creeds from the Liturgy of the Church of Ireland. At the same time he gave so much offence by continued attacks upon the doctrine of the Trinity, in an answer to Bolingbroke, that a prosecution was commenced against him in 1757. A meeting of the Irish prelates was summoned; but before the appointed time he died of a nervous fever; his illness being universally attributed to the excitement caused by the prosecution.

54. Blackburne took up the cause to which Clayton was the first martyr. The discussion, indeed, had already begun by the publication in 1749 of an anonymous book, afterwards known to be the work of John Jones, Vicar of Allonbury, Huntingdonshire, called 'Free and Candid Disquisitions relating to the Church of England.' It proposed some moderate reforms, and excited the wrath of the High Church party. Jones was defended in 1750 by Blackburne; but the only contribution to the controversy which I need mention is the 'Confessional,' which, after being for some years in manuscript, appeared in 1766, and reached a third edition in 1770. Blackburne was a sturdy Liberal in politics and theology. He owed his principles, as he tells us, to the accidental advice of a 'worthy old lay gentleman,' who said to him: 'Young man, let the first book thou readest at Cambridge be "Locke upon Government."'[2] Through life he was an energetic adherent of the school of Locke and Hoadly. He was the intimate friend and biographer of Thomas Hollis, that quaint old seventeenth-century republican, born by some accident in the eighteenth. For near fifty years he was rector of Richmond in Yorkshire and Archdeacon of Cleveland; any hopes of

[1] 'Essay on Spirit,' pp. xii. xiii. [2] Blackburne's Works, i. iv.

further preferment being effectually stopped by his avowed principles. We are told, indeed, that at 'an early period of his labours as a writer' he had[1] made up his mind never again to subscribe the Thirty-nine Articles. His sincerity is confirmed by the fact that, whilst he received only 150*l.* a year from his benefice, he refused better offers, and amongst them an offer of 400*l.* a year as successor of Samuel Chandler, in the dissenting congregation of the Old Jewry. He was a worthy and stubborn, but unluckily a rather hot-headed and puzzle-minded, writer. The 'Confessional,' without being long, succeeds in being oppressively dull. The leading principle, overlaid by a mass of prolix refutations of all manner of people, is indeed very simple. It is the application to the political question of the principles of Locke and Chillingworth. The Bible, and the Bible alone, is the religion of Protestants, and therefore a Protestant church has no right to demand any other subscription than a profession from its pastors that they receive the Scriptures as the word of God, and will instruct the people from the Scriptures alone.[2] The history of various Protestant confessions is traced amidst much confused objurgation of opponents; and the doctrine that the Thirty-nine Articles may be subscribed in a lax sense is described as an artifice of Laud's for introducing his Arminian opinions in spite of the Calvinistic sense of the articles.[3] He objects to the trimming which led such men as Burnet and Tillotson to defend the theory that they were 'articles of peace;' and concludes that 'a review of our Trinitarian forms' is 'quite necessary for the honour of the Church herself.'[4]

55. Blackburne was not himself a Unitarian. In a paper which he drew up shortly before his death he professes his belief in the divinity of Christ, though 'with limitations according to my own ideas,'[5] and says that it would never have been disputed but for the 'jargon of Athanasius.'[6] That creed he omitted in his services;[7] but, in spite of certain qualms, which he admits with great frankness in one of his published sermons,[8] he reconciled himself to the other requirements of the Church.

[1] Blackburne's Works, i. xxiii.
[2] Ib. v. 160.
[3] Ib. v. 410.
[4] Ib. v. 489.
[5] Ib. i. cxxv.
[6] Ib. i. cxxvi.
[7] Ib. i. lxv.
[8] Ib. i. 196, &c.

56. The practical effect of Blackburne's agitation was the meeting at the Feathers Tavern, which led to a petition signed by 200 persons, and presented to the House of Commons in 1772. It embodied the proposal made in the 'Confessional' for substituting a profession of belief in the Scriptures for a subscription to the articles. The petition was rejected by a majority of 217 to 71, after a speech from Burke, the imperfect notes of which are the only memorial which has now any interest for living men. Burke took the practical ground that the grievance was infinitesimal and the proposed alternative altogether illusory. It was, however, about this time that the subscription to the articles required at Cambridge from candidates for the B.A. degree was changed to a simple profession of *bona fide* membership of the Church of England. This, the sole practical result of the struggle, is, in some degree, interesting as an indication of the opinions then current at Cambridge.

57. Blackburne's friend and neighbour Lindsey, and his son-in-law Disney, seceded; the first in 1774, and the latter some years later. Men of less scrupulous conscience or less crotchety intellect preferred to soothe their minds by lowering the meaning of subscription. Paley, pointing out the absurdity of extorting the full assent and consent of all the clergy for all time to every proposition in the Thirty-nine Articles, concludes that a subscription means little more than a negation of adherence to any hostile community.[1] The doctrine, however, is given in the most explicit terms by John Hey, whose theology may be briefly described as almost identical with Paley's. Hey, who was Norrisian Professor from 1780 to 1795, is a diffuse but agreeable writer, who preaches and practises the virtue of candid treatment of his opponents. His dogmas are indeed so much softened that his Trinitarianism becomes little more than an ostensible badge of church-membership. 'We and the Socinians,' as he puts it himself, 'are said to differ, but about what? not about morality or natural religion, or the divine authority of the Christian religion; we differ only about what we do not understand; and about what is to be done on the part of God; and, if we allowed each other to use expressions at will (and what great

[1] Paley, i. 135.

matter could that be in what might almost be called unmeaning expressions?) we need never be upon our guard against each other.'[1] In defending the first article, he labours to extenuate the force of the dogmatic statements about the Trinity by interpreting them in the most negative manner. Does not this, asks an imaginary opponent, make us 'use words without meaning?' 'I think it does,' he answers; 'I profess and proclaim my confusion in the most unequivocal manner, and make it an essential part of my declaration.'[2] It would tend, he adds, to 'promote moderation, and in the end agreement, if we were industriously on all occasions to represent our own doctrine as wholly unintelligible,'[3] and he afterwards desires that forms might be invented, in which Socinians could join, so that expressions taken by the orthodox to refer to a real person might by them be taken as rhetorical, or 'as instances of the prosopopœia or metonymy.'[4] He endeavours to construct ambiguous addresses to the Son and the Holy Ghost out of phrases taken from the Scriptures, and therefore susceptible of either interpretation. Let us respect the simplicity which supposes in good faith that theologians would ever adopt formulæ intended to unite rather than to divide.

58. Meanwhile he does his best to make the articles as malleable as possible. The lapse of 230 years, as he points out, must render them in many ways inapplicable. As they become obsolete, it is often better to leave the errors in the letter untouched, and only to depart from them in spirit. Thus, by degrees, we shall arrive at 'a tacit reformation.'[5] He illustrates his theory from college statutes. A declaration that a belief in the antipodes was heretical would become obsolete and be virtually abrogated; 'Yet,' he adds, 'the *words* of the statute ought for ever to continue.'[6] The words, 'I will say so many masses for the soul of Henry VI.' may come to mean, 'I will perform the religious duties required of me by those who have authority,' and 'I will preach at Paul's Cross' to mean 'I will endeavour to propagate true religion.'[7] Thus articles of religion may drift from their primitive signification

[1] Hey's Lectures, i. 367.
[2] Ib. i. 512.
[3] Ib. i. 513.
[4] Ib. i. 649.
[5] Ib. i. 375.
[6] Ib. i. 379.
[7] Ib. i. 381.

with scarcely an assignable limit. The purpose of articles is rather to make men agree in whatever opinions than to make them agree in any particular opinions.[1] By such casuistry he succeeds in convincing himself that articles cannot from their nature be inconsistent with any opinions unknown to the compiler; nor with new solutions of old doctrines; and that no 'common person' need scruple in verbally assenting to any article if he is ignorant of the heresies against which it is aimed.[2] Finally, 'unintelligible articles,' as he calls them, which apparently include the articles about the Trinity, need give us very little trouble. He agrees with Voltaire in condemning the folly of the nuns of St. Cyran, who refused to assent to propositions on the ground that they did not understand them. Their want of comprehension was the very reason which would have justified them. In giving such assents for the sake of peace and order we neither lie to God nor injure man;[3] and we may therefore do it with a safe conscience. The moral is that we are to be of the Established Church, 'when it is not intolerably at variance' with our opinions; if not, to be of that sect from which we differ least, but in any event to be of any religion rather than none.[4]

59. The yoke which Hey would impose was certainly not a heavy one. He, in fact, holds with the deists, that talk about the Trinity is little better than unmeaning gibberish; but, unlike them, he considers that to be a reason for using it. Why baulk at such a trifle? The doctrine that words should be used in non-natural senses has not often been avowed so openly. The morality, doubtful in any case, could only pass muster when the leading divines of the time had become profoundly indifferent to the tenets thus undermined. The intellectual party of the Church was Socinian in everything but name.

[1] Hey's Lectures, i. 385.
[2] Ib. i. 400.
[3] Ib. i. 407.
[4] Ib. i. 420.

## VI. THE UNITARIANS.

60. A curious illustration of these tendencies is to be found in a ponderous treatise called 'The Apology of Ben Mordecai to his Friends for embracing Christianity.' It appeared in a series of letters between the years 1771 and 1777, which were republished in a collective form in 1784. The author was Henry Taylor, vicar of Portsmouth; and it is significant that a clergyman should have been permitted without question to make an open and elaborate attack upon the tenets of the Athanasian Creed. The book, which makes a considerable display of learning, is of the hopelessly unreadable kind. Vast quagmires of patristic antiquarianism encompass the weary traveller, and scarcely one gleam of historical sense is vouchsafed to guide him on his road. If at rare intervals he emerges to a bit of sounder footing in the shape of a rational argument, the basis of reasoning is too flimsy to deserve serious examination. The converted Jew, who is the nominal author, takes occasion to refute Hume's argument, and is one of the few writers who condescends to a controversy with Chubb. His main argument, however, is a justification of himself for abandoning the faith of his fathers by proving that Christianity does not involve Tritheism, inasmuch as it does not necessitate a belief in the divinity of Christ. Taylor's objection to that doctrine does not rest on any exalted conception of the Deity. His God is anthropomorphic. God makes up his mind from time to time according to circumstances; 'perhaps,' as he naïvely remarks in the course of an argument about the Messiah, 'Almighty God had not so soon determined from what family the promised son should spring,'[1] and he assumes the existence of a large class of events 'unfixed and undetermined by God and indifferent.'[2] To such a Deity, of course, the difficulties about miracles, answers to prayer, and an historical revelation have no relation. The fact that he has been quiescent for the last 1,700 years is no proof that he would never exert himself on occasions of sufficient importance.[3] Although his Supreme Being is no longer the immutable and inconceivable essence of meta-

[1] 'Ben Mordecai,' p. 494. [2] Ib. p. 665. [3] Ib. p. 938.

physicians, Taylor feels the difficulty of bridging the gulf between deity and humanity. His chief philosophical argument, and he sometimes puts it with considerable force,[1] is the impossibility of asserting at once the divinity of Christ and the reality of his sufferings. On all hands you are surrounded by heresies. If you say that God suffered, you are a Patripassian ; if that the human nature alone suffered, you are a Socinian ; if you say that the divine was separated from the human nature at the passion, you become a Cerinthian. By flying from any one of his errors, the 'orthodox' unavoidably falls into an opposite one.[2] The attempted evasion by asserting two contradictory propositions at once is merely verbal. Taylor, therefore, adopts the Arian hypothesis that Christ was a created being, though the first of all creatures, and identified him with 'the angel of the covenant as the visible Jehovah who so often appeared to the patriarchs in Shechinah and gave the law.'[3]

61. He has of course no difficulty in proving that the Jehovah of the early Jews must be a different being from the loftier Deity of later ages. Without idly following him amongst the dead phantoms of creeds which haunt his bewildered wanderings, it may perhaps be suggested that views of this kind, when freed from their envelope of extinct theological dogmas, are a simple-minded approximation towards an historical view. The recognition of a difference between the old God and the new is a step towards tracing the history of thought ; though, for the present, each form of creed is supposed to correspond to an objective reality. The historical tendency, however, is marked much less equivocally in the writers whom we have now to consider. Taylor's book may be regarded as a crude attempt to reduce Christian theology within the borders of the conceivable, if not of the credible. Christ, though not a mere man, becomes a being of intelligible attributes. The belief in the Trinity, however, had long ceased to be robust enough to throw out heresies of any vitality, and Arianism could be at most a passing stage towards the development of a more intelligible doctrine.

62. Of another Arian, Richard Price, whom we shall meet

[1] *E.g.* 'Ben Mordecai,' p. 114 *et seq.*
[2] Ib. p. 124.
[3] Ib. preface, p. iv.

again, it is enough to say here that his 'Dissertations' appeared in 1769. Of the last, which refers to the miracle argument, I have already spoken. The first three, on providence, prayer, and 'the reasons for expecting that virtuous men shall meet after death in a state of happiness,' contain some practical exhortations of more than the usual animation of the period. Price still believes in a God who attends to the universe—at least, in regard to all events not 'wholly frivolous.'[1] His arguments, however, are chiefly a reproduction of the old optimistic Deism of Clarke and Wollaston, with which he mixes some reasonings from the great object of his admiration, Bishop Butler. The very notion that anything in the universe is as it should not be appears to him to be 'self-evidently incredible.'[2] He does not believe, for he cannot find in Scripture, the 'ultimate restoration of all mankind,' but he holds that the future punishment will consist chiefly in the annihilation of being, not in the torture of living beings;[3] and he infers from the essential properties of matter, and from the old dogma that nothing can act or know where it is not,[4] the existence of an 'infinite spirit' by which 'the creation is confirmed and sustained;' whilst he succeeds, by the help of Wollaston, in reconciling this universal power with the doctrine of free-will.[5] Such a theology, though it led to some amicable controversy with Priestley, was too far removed from the general current of speculation to have much influence; and Price, like others, was soon absorbed in political writings, which have left a more important mark. Theologically speaking, he was an anachronism—a remnant of an earlier form of thought amidst totally uncongenial circumstances; and his writings, which are cloudy in expression though amiable in spirit, need only be noted as illustrating the fact that contemporary influences had not quite extinguished the old metaphysical theories.

63. An intimate friend of Price succeeded in causing a wider sensation. Joseph Priestley was a man of amazing activity and versatility of mind. Brought up amongst the dissenters as a strict Calvinist, he had gradually passed from orthodoxy to Arianism; and in time advanced to

[1] 'Dissertations,' p. 8.
[2] Ib. p. 19.
[3] Ib. p. 134.
[4] Ib. p. 42.
[5] Ib. p. 11.

Socinianism, where his development was abruptly arrested. Hartley was his great master in philosophy; his views on the Atonement had at an early period brought him into communication with Lardner; and he appears to have had some friendly intercourse with poor Annet, the last of the deists.[1] His ability rapidly gave him a distinguished position amongst the liberal dissenters; and his early publications were intended to set forth their theological views. Priestley, however, possessed one of those restless intellects which are incapable of confining themselves to any single task, and, unfortunately, incapable in consequence of sounding the depths of any philosophical system. Urged partly by his natural bent, and partly, it may be, constrained by the pressure of poverty, he gave to the world a numerous series of dissertations which, with the exception of his scientific writings, bear the marks of hasty and superficial thought.[2] As a man of science he has left his mark upon the intellectual history of the century; but, besides being a man of science, he aimed at being a metaphysician, a theologian, a politician, a classical scholar, and a historian. With an amazing intrepidity he plunged into tasks the effective performance of which would have demanded the labours of a lifetime. With the charge of thirty youths on his hands he proposes to write an ecclesiastical history, and soon afterwards observes that a fresh translation of the Old Testament would 'not be a very formidable task.'[3] He carried on all manner of controversies, upon their own ground, with Horsley and Badcock, with his friend Price, with Beattie and the Scotch philosophers, with Gibbon and the sceptics, and yet often laboured for six hours a day at his chemical experiments. So discursive a thinker could hardly do much thorough work, nor really work out or co-ordinate his own opinions. Pushing rationalism to conclusions which shocked the orthodox, he yet retained the most puerile superstitions. He disbelieved in the inspiration of the Apostles, and found fault with St. Paul's reasoning, but had

[1] Life by Rutt, i. 19.

[2] Priestley's income at Needham, his first charge, was 40*l.* a year, and at Leeds 105*l.* a year. Lord Shelburne, to whom he went from Leeds in 1773, allowed him 250*l.* a year and a house. He afterwards received a subscription to enable him to carry on his scientific researches.

[3] Life, i. 421.

full faith in the prophecies, and at a late period of his life expected the coming of Christ within twenty years. Nelson's victories were to fulfil the predictions contained in the 19th chapter of Isaiah, and he suspected that Napoleon was the deliverer promised to Egypt.[1] In his youth he had become convinced, as he tells us, of the falsity of the doctrines of the Atonement and the inspiration of the Bible, and 'of all idea of supernatural interference except' (a singular exception!) 'for the purpose of miracles.'[2] Near half a century's familiarity with theological speculation failed to emancipate his mind from the bondage of half-truths.

64. It would be in vain, therefore, to anticipate any great force or originality in Priestley's speculations. At best, he was a quick reflector of the current opinions of his time and class, and able to run up hasty theories of sufficient apparent stability to afford a temporary refuge amidst the storm of conflicting elements. Priestley caricatures the ordinary English tendencies to make a compromise between things incompatible. A Christian and a materialist; sympathising keenly with the French Revolution, and yet holding to the remnant of the doctrines to which it was vitally opposed; a political ally and a religious opponent of the spirit which spoke through Tom Paine; abandoning the mysterious and yet retaining the supernatural elements of Christianity; rapidly glancing at the surface of opinion, and incapable of appreciating its deeper tendencies—he flashes out at times some quick and instructive estimate of one side of a disputed argument, only to relapse at the next moment into crude dogmas and obsolete superstitions.

65. Priestley, as a philosopher, illustrates the tendency to supplant metaphysical by scientific methods; though, unfortunately, both his metaphysical and scientific theories were hopelessly crude. His great teacher was Hartley, whose 'Theory of the Human Mind' he republished in 1775, omitting the peculiar hypothesis of vibrations. It was, however, in the course of an attack upon Beattie's Common Sense philosophy,[3] that his mind, recently excited by Boscovich's theory of matter, struck out the doctrines which seemed to him to be of vital importance to theology. This

[1] Life, ii. 119, 417. [2] Ib. i. 140. [3] 'Disquisitions,' i. vi.

doctrine may be regarded as a crude anticipation of the positive view. Thought, he observed, was a function of the brain, and it was contrary to the rules of sound philosophy to make the superfluous hypothesis of a separate substance in which thought might be assumed to inhere.[1] But, instead of distinctly inferring with modern positivists that we could know nothing of the ultimate nature either of mind or body, Priestley adopts the view that the soul is itself material. According to his quaint illustration, it resembles a razor. The power of thought inheres in it as the power of cutting in the razor. The razor dissolved in acids is annihilated, and the body destroyed by putrefaction, the power of thinking ceases. But the particles remain in each case; and the soul, like the razor, may again be put together.[2] The advantage of this doctrine, according to Priestley, was that it confirmed Bishop Law's theory of the seat of the soul. The soul, in fact, being a piece of mechanism, is taken to pieces at death, and though it may afterwards be put together again by divine power, there is no ground for the superstitions embodied in the doctrine of purgatory. Moreover, it strikingly confirms the Socinian doctrine by removing all pretext for a belief in the pre-existence of Christ. How far Priestley's logic is invulnerable upon these abstruse questions is a matter of very little importance. The general tendency of his argument is to reduce all religious theory to a department of inductive science. The whole existing order of things being an elaborate piece of mechanism, we infer the Almighty mechanist by the familiar watch argument.[3] Indeed, the Deity himself becomes almost phenomenal, and Priestley has considerable trouble in saving him from materiality. He denies that a belief in his immateriality would increase our reverence for him,[4] and declares that he must be in some sense extended and have some common property with the matter upon which he acts. It would seem, indeed, that God is rather matter of a different kind from the ordinary than in any strict sense immaterial.

66. With these doctrines, a belief in necessity was inseparably connected in Priestley's mind; and long controversies ensued, in which, with incessant repetition and wearisome dif-

[1] See 'Disquisitions,' i. 47.
[2] 'Price and Priestley on Materialism,' p. 82.
[3] 'Disquisitions,' i. 187.
[4] Ib. i. 185.

fuseness, Priestley assails Price, Jacob Bryant, Horsley, and others with weapons drawn from Hobbes, Hume, Collins, and Hartley. The general outcome of the whole is, however, sufficiently plain. Priestley's aim was to combine theology and science, by accepting a view of God and the soul which should make them accessible to ordinary methods of scientific investigation. The existence of God was to be proved from the whole machinery; the immortality of the soul, or rather the dogma of its reconstruction, from the testimony of the Apostles, whose veracity was guaranteed by the miracles. His assailants took refuge in scraps of old metaphysics, and in the defences erected by the school of Beattie. The whole theory, however, is one of those little eddies of thought which can hardly maintain themselves in the minds of their originators, and are speedily swept away by stronger currents. Perhaps the chief interest of the argument is in Priestley's superficial, but well-meant, attempt to trace the history of the doctrines under consideration. This method of treatment reveals itself more fully in the controversy with which his name is most generally associated.

67. Priestley's 'History of the Corruptions of Christianity' appeared in 1782, and led to the most exciting controversy in the latter half of the eighteenth century. His antagonist, Samuel Horsley, owed his elevation to the bench to his triumph over the unbeliever. Horsley, like Priestley, had devoted some attention to scientific questions. He was an active Fellow of the Royal Society, and published an edition of Newton's works. He had been educated at Cambridge, where the memory of the illustrious teacher was cherished with almost superstitious reverence; and endeavoured to place that sacred authority on the side of theology in a pamphlet, of which the title may sufficiently indicate the contents: 'The Power of God Deduced from the Instantaneous Productions of it in the Solar System.' For the rest, he was a man of vigorous understanding, wide reading, and accurate scholarship; logical and nervous in his style, with a strong dash of arrogance, and by no means disposed to treat an opponent with excessive candour. As incompetent as Priestley to take a really philosophical view of the subject, he had the advantage which a close and well-trained thinker possesses

over a loose, discursive and precipitate writer. The contrast between the two men somewhat resembles that between Bentley and Collins; though Horsley was not the equal of Bentley, whilst Priestley was probably the superior of Collins.[1] The result is generally described in similar terms. The utter confutation of the infidel and the conclusive triumph of the orthodox is supposed to have been the issue of both passages of arms. That Horsley detected Priestley in some gross blunders of scholarship was indeed palpable; and it was naturally inferred that a man who could not construe Greek must be wrong about the Trinity. A decisive exposure of certain definite errors is more easily appreciated than a victory in the field of philosophical enquiry; and thus Horsley's triumph appeared to be even more conclusive than a competent judge might have admitted.

68. I shall not, however, attempt to enter into any minute discussion of the merits of a controversy which speedily diverged into abstruse questions of ecclesiastical history; and which can now be interesting only so far as it illustrates the fundamental assumptions of the disputants. Priestley's position may be easily defined. He is essentially a Protestant pushing one step further the arguments already familiar in the great controversy with Rome. Zuicker and Episcopius, according to Horsley, had anticipated his main theory; and, indeed, there is but a question of degree between Priestley and other Protestant writers upon the early ages of Christianity. He endeavours to draw the limits of the supernatural still more closely than his predecessors. All Protestants admitted that at some early period Christianity had been corrupted. Priestley includes amongst the corruptions the Trinitarian doctrines, which, as he admits, showed themselves, though in a comparatively undeveloped state, amongst the earliest of the post-apostolic writers. He continues the attack upon the authority of the fathers which Daillé had commenced,

[1] An odd little coincidence is that in both controversies a dispute took place over the meaning of the word *idiota*, and that the combatants changed sides. Bentley has to show that the Apostles were not called 'idiots' by Victor in the modern sense; and Horsley that the Unitarians were called idiots in something very like the modern sense by Tertullian. Poor Priestley doubtless thought that, with Bentley to back him, his triumph was secure; but I presume that Horsley was in the right.

and which had been lately carried on by Middleton and Jortin. He makes Christ a mere man, and places the writers of the New Testament on the same level with Thucydides or Tacitus; whilst he still believes in the miracles, and quotes texts after the old unhistorical fashion. He is compelled, moreover, to accept the Protestant theory that there was in the earliest ages a body of absolutely sound doctrine; though, in the effort to identify this with Unitarianism, he is driven to great straits, and forced to discover it in obscure sects, and to make inferences from the negative argument of silence rather than from positive assertions. Though he makes free with the reasoning of the Apostles, he cannot give up their authority; and, accepting without question the authenticity of the Gospels, labours to interpret them in the Unitarian sense. In short, though he has cast off many of the fetters, those which remain are as galling as ever. He cannot see that the real difficulty is the admission of supernatural agency; and that to call a miracle a very little one is only to encounter the whole weight of rationalist and of orthodox hostility. His aim, as he explains in his preface, is to show 'what circumstances in the state of things' (the expression is characteristic of his slipshod style), 'and especially of other prevailing opinions and prejudices,' [1] favoured the introduction of new doctrines. He hopes that this 'historical method will be found to be one of the most satisfactory modes of argumentation' [1] for his purpose. He deserves high praise for thus seeing the importance of the method destined to produce a transformation of modern thought. Unluckily, it is of little use to adopt the historical method, whilst rejecting its fundamental canon. An imperfect application of a true principle, and superficial knowledge of the subject matter to which it is to be applied, vitiate the whole of Priestley's argument. He is a judge who is not impartial, who has a scanty knowledge of the evidence, who treats it by no distinct logical principles, and who has not even devoted the whole strength of his mind to the case. No wonder if he gives many openings to a skilful adversary!

69. Priestley and Horsley, indeed, are equally unhistorical

[1] 'Corruptions,' i. preface, p. xiv.

in their treatment, though Horsley has a far more thorough knowledge of the evidence. Priestley, for example, in the midst of his rationalising, calmly accepts as historical the legend of the Fall;[1] and quietly informs Gibbon that 'Moses and the other writers of the Old Testament were as much present at the time of the transactions they relate as the historians of Julius Cæsar or Alexander.'[2] Horsley as calmly quotes the narratives of the gospels of Matthew and Luke as a conclusive proof of the miraculous conception. 'Many of the near relations of the Holy Family must have been living' when Matthew published his account, 'by whom the story, had it been false, had been easily confuted.'[3]

70. Both disputants, again, are equally at sea in discussing the development of speculative opinions. Priestley asserts that corruptions appeared, but in practice seems to attribute them to perverse chances rather than to the influence of contemporary opinion, which he professes to trace. Thus, in discussing theories of grace, he says, 'it is not easy to imagine *a priori* what could have led men into such a train of thinking'[4] as is exhibited in the speculations about grace, free-will, and predestination. After some vague handling of the problem, he remembers that the 'principal parts' of the system 'were first suggested in the heat of controversy'[5]—an explanation which appears to him to throw some light upon the question. Obviously, a writer thus incompetent to appreciate the bearings of the most vital doctrines of Christianity was a very competent historian of thought. Priestley, however, perceives, what was indeed sufficiently palpable, that Platonism had played a great part in the development of Christian dogma. Horsley was far more deeply read in Platonic literature, and had no trouble in exposing some of Priestley's incidental misconceptions. His answer, however, to the suggestion exhibits the genealogy of ideas. The Platonists, he tells us, 'pretended to be no more than the expositors of a more ancient doctrine;' which he traces through Parmenides, the Pythagoreans, and Orpheus, to 'the secret lore of the Egyptian priests.' Another stream of tradition

[1] 'Corruptions,' i. 286.
[2] Ib. ii. 446.
[3] Horsley, 'Tracts against Priestley,' p. 325.
[4] 'Corruptions,' i. 284.
[5] Ib. p. 285.

had reached the Romans from 'their Trojan ancestors,' who had received it from Phrygia, where it had been planted by Dardanus, 'so early as the ninth century after Noah's flood.' Dardanus brought it from Samothrace, where the 'Three Mighty Ones' were worshipped under the Hebrew name of the Cabirim. And thus the Platonic Trinity, and the Roman Jupiter, Juno and Minerva, were shown to be simply faint reflections of an early revelation communicated to the patriarchs before the days of Moses.[1] The new spirit of historical criticism was already coming to life in Germany when this argument was seriously put forward in answer to a freethinker. But it is abundantly clear that the breath of modern science had not yet touched the high places of English theology.

71. Horsley's superior knowledge of the writings of the fathers gave him a great advantage in the discussions bearing more directly upon the controversy. Priestley had avowedly taken much of his information at second hand. To have written exclusively from original sources would, as he remarks, have taken more than a lifetime; and what is the use of other men's labours, if they are not to save trouble for ourselves?[2] He had, however, as he expressed it with unlucky candour, 'looked carefully through'[3] many of the writings of the early fathers; but, of course, looking through involves much overlooking, as it produces many downright blunders. He confesses, though he endeavours to extenuate the importance of, some of these errors.[4] The trained scholarship of the orthodox divine asserted its superiority over the desultory cram of the teacher at a dissenting academy; and such palpable blots perhaps injured the credit of the writer even more than their intrinsic value justified. It was, however, abundantly clear that Priestley was a rash and unqualified critic. His main proposition was that the earliest Christians were Unitarians; and that Unitarianism remained for a long time the creed of the masses, and was, therefore, not condemned as a heresy, though the more cultivated Christians had adopted the Trinitarian views. When confronted by testimonies from such early writings as the epistle of Barnabas, or the Ignatian epistles, he takes refuge in vague assertions of

[1] Horsley's 'Tracts,' pp. 43, 44, 45.
[2] 'Corruptions,' i. p. xviii.
[3] Ib. p. xvii.
[4] See Priestley's 'Tracts,' p. 325.

interpolation, whilst obviously quite unable to say how far the interpolations, admitted to some extent, really injured the value of the documents as evidence. It becomes evident, indeed, that the real difference between the disputants is in their tacit assumptions. Horsley charges his opponent with reasoning in a circle. 'So long,' he says, 'as the sixth page of the first volume of Dr. Priestley's history shall be extant, the masters of the dialectic art will be at no loss for an example of the circulating syllogism.'[1] Priestley, that is, argues that St. John's language is to be understood in the Unitarian sense, because the early Christians were Unitarians; and that the early Christians were Unitarians because St. John preaches Unitarianism. In fact, Priestley, in order to make up his body of primitive true believers, has to assume that the early writers did not really represent the opinions of the great body of their fellow-Christians.

72. He discovered, however, some solid ground for his argument. The 'citadel of his strength,'[2] as Horsley expresses it, was the argument from the obscure sects of Nazarenes and Ebionites. This is the point upon which the controversy rages most furiously. The rivals, as they wax warm, drop the courteous 'dear Sir' of their early letters, and accuse each other with great frankness of equivocation and downright lying. They are the more zealous as the materials at their disposal were almost as limited as those which supplied the disputants in the 'Antiquary;' and each has that weakness for omniscience which infects most historical critics. A few oblique references in later writers have to be distorted into conclusive proofs of the tenets held by Nazarenes and Ebionites. It might have been admitted, without much prejudice to either side, that Unitarian opinions were prevalent amongst the early Jewish Christians; but such a modest conclusion will satisfy neither party. Each will have it that Nazarenes and Ebionites had settled a scheme of doctrine as coherent and distinct as the Westminster Confession; though one identifies this scheme with the teaching of the Apostles, and the other declares it to have been invented by evil-minded persons at a much later period. If poor Epiphanius in the fourth century does not know whether the Nazarenes were or were not heretical

[1] Horsley, p. 12. [2] Ib. p. 125.

about Christ's divinity, Priestley makes the admission of ignorance equivalent to an admission that they did not believe.[1] Horsley declares that the same admission 'amounts to an unwilling testimony of a base accuser, who had not the liberality to absolve in explicit terms when he found himself unable to convict.'[2] A similar dispute rages over the body of Origen, who was unlucky enough to remark incidentally that all the Jewish Christians were Ebionites. This passage, which supports Priestley's view, is explained away by Horsley on the strength of another passage, tending to show that Origen used the word in a lax sense; but he adds the more satisfactory reply, that Origen was a liar. Mosheim had declared, and Horsley flourishes the declaration in his antagonist's face, in all the pomp of capital letters, that he would 'not believe this witness (Origen) upon his oath, vending, as he manifestly does, such flimsy lies.'[3] Priestley, in reply, labours to defend the character of 'this most respectable man,'[4] and proclaims Horsley to be 'a falsifier of history,' and 'a defamer of the character of the illustrious dead.'[5]

73. But enough of such wranglings. Admitting that Horsley has the best of the immediate argument, and that Priestley's thesis is very imperfect, there remains one important consideration. Priestley challenges Horsley to assign the period at which a belief in Christ's divinity first arose. He argues, with great force, on the impossibility of supposing that the Apostles could have believed that the man whom they saw in flesh and blood was God Almighty.[6] Indeed, the imagination refuses to accept the shock produced by the doctrine of the Incarnation, unless some modifying halo of time or distance be introduced. 'I am really astonished,' says Priestley, 'how you can really entertain the idea of any number of persons being on this *even footing*, as you call it, with a being whom they actually believed to be maker of themselves and all things, even the Eternal God himself.'[7] Could Judas Iscariot, he asks, have possibly formed a design to betray one whom he believed to be his

[1] 'Corruptions,' i. 8.
[2] Horsley's 'Tracts,' pp. 26 and 144.
[3] Ib. pp. 159, 353, and 355.
[4] Priestley's 'Tracts,' p. 351.
[5] Ib. p. 474.
[6] Ib. p. 258, &c.
[7] Ib. p. 259.

God, or Peter have denied or taken him to task during his lifetime?[1] Horsley, of course, has no difficulty in ridiculing Priestley for calling such a witness as the arch traitor,[2] or in declaring the burden of proof to be with his antagonist. The argument, in fact, becomes convincing when we have placed ourselves at the historical point of view, but naturally fails to impress a writer who, professing belief in the divinity of a man, has placed himself beyond all reach of a *reductio ad absurdum*. Priestley, however, only assumes the true position intermittently and incompletely. He gives a list of 'maxims of historical criticism,'[3] which are sound enough as far as they go, but which avoid the really critical question as to an admission of supernatural agency. It is true, and much to the purpose, that the belief in Christ's divinity must have had some natural origin; and if Priestley had examined the conditions under which the belief arose with due care and ability, he might have anticipated some results of modern criticism. Unluckily his willingness to accept the miraculous as long as it was in his favour, his desire to assign the latest possible date to the origin and prevalence of the belief, and his quiet assumption of the absolute authenticity of all the primary documents, whilst rashly attacking the authority of all the later documents, brings him into so incoherent a position, and causes him to apply his canons of criticism so fitfully, that his performance is all but worthless. It may have in some degree facilitated the spread of a truer historical spirit, but it certainly gave an unmistakable triumph to his opponents.

74. Undaunted by his defeat, Priestley returned to the charge in a 'History of Early Opinions concerning Christ,' a huge work in four volumes, 'the result,' as Horsley sneers, 'of a whole two years' study of the writers of antiquity.'[4] Horsley scornfully declined to take the trouble of reading it, and states, what may well be believed, that it had a very slow sale. Perhaps it will be our easiest course to follow Horsley's example, and allow the copies to 'innocently rot in the printer's warehouse,' or the other receptacles into which time or fortune may have drifted them. The same fate must be allowed to overtake the tracts of Priestley's amiable and faith-

[1] Priestley's 'Tracts,' pp. 62, 258.
[2] Ib. p. 215.
[3] Ib. p. 127.
[4] Horsley's 'Tracts,' p. xii.

ful friend, Theophilus Lindsey, a man to be mentioned with respect for his voluntary abandonment of preferment in obedience to the calls of his conscience, but a feeble and insipid writer.

75. After making every allowance for the strange restlessness of mind which prevented Priestley from working out his own opinions, and for the strong prepossessions with which he came to the task, it is still rather difficult to understand how so versatile and daring a thinker could have retained so much of the old system. But he appears to have been to the last utterly unconscious that the methods to which he gave free play outside the charmed circle would, if consistently applied, destroy the last citadel of supernaturalism. Priestley, however, is not an isolated case. The career and the intellectual position of another writer of the time strongly resemble those of Priestley, though their only intercourse seems to have been of a controversial kind. Gilbert Wakefield was a man who received scanty justice. His contemporaries condemned him as hot-headed, arrogant, and eccentric, though they contemptuously admitted his honesty. He was weak enough, they declared, to fall in love with the opinions for which he made sacrifices, and would, so they argued, have ceased to love them had they been generally acceptable. He was as dogmatic about trifles as about serious matters; 'he was as violent against Greek accents as he was against the Trinity, and anathematised the final ν as strongly as episcopacy.' He had, in short, that love of petty crotchets which distinguishes men of his temperament, and which flourishes in revolutionary periods. He was a teetotaller and vegetarian in the good old days of port wine and roast beef, and had he lived a generation later would doubtless have been at the head of numerous societies for the regeneration of mankind. Our ancestors dealt him shorter and sharper measure. Poor Wakefield's restless energy carried him, like Priestley, into politics. He accused Pitt's Ministry of corruption, and was tried for libel in 1799. His speech in defence affords one of the curious illustrations of character so abundant in our State trials.[1] His worldly wisdom may be measured by the opening passage, in which, with a vast

[1] See Howell's 'State Trials,' 39 George III.

amount of turgid rhetoric, he proves that the Attorney-General, who prosecuted him, was *ex officio* corrupt and prejudiced; that the same reasoning applies in its degree to the judge; and that the jury, though he condescends to some ostensible personal exception, must, from their mode of nomination, be hopelessly partial. He then candidly avows his opinion that Fox is 'the angel of redemption,' and Pitt 'the demon of destruction' for all Europe. Eldon, then Attorney-General, simply said that he should be degraded by replying to such a speech, and Lord Kenyon, observing in his peculiar style that Wakefield did not justify a certain maxim about 'ingenuas artes,' left the case to the jury. Two years' imprisonment punished the bold assailant of the proprieties, and he emerged, in 1801, only to die of typhus fever, at the age of 45.

76. One passage in Wakefield's printed defence conveys an irony worthy of Fielding. He had applied in his trouble to certain ecclesiastical dignitaries who had been his intimates at Cambridge, and might, as he thought, be witnesses to his character. Their letters in reply are given, along with some earlier letters of unsuspecting friendship, and the contrast is instructive. They had risen like decent sober men of the world to rich preferment, and could hardly be expected to keep on terms with a revolutionary Unitarian. Pretyman, for example, had received the bishopric of Lincoln as a token of the esteem of his old pupil, the 'demon of destruction,' and one may fully believe his assurance that the expression of his present sentiments about Wakefield would be 'injurious rather than useful' to him upon his trial. We who do not see so plainly that the path of virtue coincides with the road to a bishopric are inclined to pardon poor Wakefield's imprudence, and even his dogmatism and bombast, in consideration of his honesty. Yet it must be admitted that a theologian swept away in this vortex of bitter political struggle could have little chance of doing himself justice. The time was too feverish for much speculative progress.

77. In an 'Essay upon Inspiration,' published in 1781, Wakefield works out the recognised theory that we should believe in as few miracles as possible. The inspiration of the Gospels is unnecessary, because 'strength of judgment, ade-

quate information, and unbiassed affections,'[1] are sufficient guarantees for historical accuracy. It was 'inexpedient and improbable,'[2] because a complete consistency would have led to suspicions of complicity. It was disclaimed by the writers themselves; and, moreover, cases of absolute contradiction can be produced. Christ really wished to show the efficacy of truth operating without supernatural advantages; for he doubtless shared the views of the eighteenth-century evidence-writers. Indeed, the vessels to which the sacred charge was committed were so frail that many later Christians have been 'possessed of dispositions more benevolent and godlike, of understandings more liberal and enlightened, and have walked in all respects more worthy of their vocation than most of the twelve apostles.'[3] Yet Wakefield still accepts an ample degree of inspiration in other writings; and thinks—characteristically enough when his own taste for bombast is remembered—that the Gospels, as compared with the Old Testament prophecies, show 'the disparity between the thoughts and language of man and his Creator.'[4] Wakefield in this says little more than Conyers Middleton had said before him.

78. An attempt to push rationalism yet one degree further without transgressing the line is exhibited in the writings of Edward Evanson. Evanson had been a clergyman of the Church of England; and, after provoking a prosecution for certain liberties taken with the liturgy and a heretical sermon, he resigned his preferments in 1778, and supported himself by taking pupils. In 1772 he had already attacked the orthodox views of the Trinity in rather coarse language, and in 1777 he wrote a letter to Hurd, then Bishop of Lichfield, about the prophecies. His lordship, it seems, had taken for granted that Daniel's little horn was identical with St. Paul's man of sin and the seven-headed beast of the Revelations. This confusion was somehow connected with the theory that the Church of Rome was Antichrist; whereas Evanson was quite clear that the Church of England, and indeed all other churches in existence, had quite as good a right to that title. He proved from the prophecies that 'either the Christian revelation is not true, or the religion of every orthodox church

[1] Essay, &c., p. 29.
[2] Ib. p. 36.
[3] Ib. p. 108.
[4] Ib. p. 42.

in Europe is fabulous and false'[1]—a pleasant dilemma for a Christian advocate. Evanson was, in fact, one of those men who save themselves from falling into the gulf of infidelity by a single precarious argument, and are equally indignant with all who hold more or less than themselves. It had occurred to him that it was possible to split hairs once more by help of a distinction sometimes noticed in apologetic literature. The evidence of miracles grows weaker as it passes through several hands; but a prophecy is a miracle of which the evidence grows stronger for a time. It is a miracle worked in presence of two generations. There was overwhelming evidence that the last books of the canon had been written at least sixteen centuries before, and if they gave a clear history of the events of 1792, the supernatural knowledge of their authors was demonstrated. The theory was so taking, that Evanson, like some wiser men, assumed, without excessive nicety of enquiry, that the facts corresponded. Evanson accordingly discovered in the book of Revelations that the alliance of Church and State under Constantine would cause the 'grand apostacy' to Trinitarianism, and thus that Christianity must be true because every one had ceased to believe in it. Strong in such arguments, he felt entitled to say that, but for the prophetic evidence, he should have referred the Old Testament miracles 'to the same class with the Romulus et Remus of the Romans,'[2] and the marvels which gather round the cradle of every other nation.

79. He pushed his audacity to a free criticism of the New Testament. In 1792 he published a book called the 'Dissonance of the Four generally received Evangelists.' One sentence in it deserves notice. 'It is an obvious axiom,' he says, 'that in the investigation of the doctrines of Christianity, the first necessary step is to enquire into the truth and authenticity of those original writings in which they are contained; but the misfortune is that nobody takes this important necessary step of the enquiry in any firm satisfactory manner.'[3] Nothing could be truer; but, unfortunately, poor Evanson was utterly unqualified to carry out his principle. He was aware, indeed, of some of the difficulties to

[1] Letter to Hurd, p. 127.
[2] 'Letter to Dr. Priestley's Young Man,' p. 7.
[3] 'Dissonance,' &c., p. 18.

which well-meaning concordance-writers had drawn attention, and notices, for example, the wide difference between the narratives of the first three Evangelists and that of St. John's gospel. But his critical acumen does not take him far. His main test for distinguishing the spurious from the authentic narratives is the existence in the authentic of prophecies which have been satisfactorily fulfilled. Applying this criterion, and rejecting such portions of Scripture as appear to him for various reasons to be unintelligible, or of immoral tendency, he determines upon excising from the New Testament the whole of three gospels, the Epistles to the Romans, Ephesians, Colossians, Hebrews, and those of James, Peter, John, and Jude, besides parts of the favoured gospel of St. Luke, of the Acts of the Apostles, and even of the Apocalypse. A New Testament adapted to this theory was published by the author, but has, it may be supposed, not had so extensive a circulation as the work in its original form. There appears, however, to be no reason to doubt Evanson's sincerity, nor even, except South's familiar witticism about the effect of apocalyptic studies, his sanity.

80. Priestley and Wakefield illustrate that peculiar form of semi-rationalism which was combined with English radicalism. Had they lived in Germany, Priestley's restless energy would have been limited to his laboratory, and Wakefield would have denounced rival philologists instead of attorney-generals. In France their hostility to the orthodox would have carried them beyond the region of futile compromises, where Priestley's materialism would have made a more natural alliance with Atheism than with Christianity. A man like Condorcet must have shrugged his shoulders in pity at the strange superstitions which the scientific culture of Englishmen had been unable to disperse. Meanwhile, however, there was undoubtedly scepticism enough amongst the more cultivated classes. When orthodoxy was of so mild a type, indeed, scepticism could afford to be quiescent. Two great assaults, however, were made upon Christianity during the last quarter of the century, and both, though for very different reasons, were highly significant. Gibbon, the man of profound learning, and the staunch political Conservative, and Paine, the man of uncultivated common sense, and the red-

hot revolutionist, struck blows after their own fashion, which announced the approach of a new order of things. Gibbon's first volumes, including the celebrated 15th and 16th chapters, appeared in 1776.

### *VII. THE INFIDELS.*

81. By their contemporaries, Hume, Robertson, and Gibbon were regarded as the triumvirate of great historians, whose fame was to reflect a permanent lustre upon their age and country. Their writings, indeed, whatever defects may have been discovered in them by later historians, were, in fact, amongst the most characteristic products of the time. Unluckily Hume's and Robertson's fame was insecurely based. They constructed elegant summaries of the knowledge then attainable, but worked in a perfunctory spirit. Later labourers in that fruitful field have gathered a harvest so immense that they have been all but overwhelmed by their own industry; and we are beginning to wish for a new Hume or Robertson to give the essence of the heterogeneous masses of fact which cumber the earth. Gibbon, more fortunate in his subject, and far more thorough in his methods, produced a monumental work not yet, if it ever will be, superseded. And, therefore, though he repudiates as presumptuous the pretension to a place in the triumvirate,[1] he is now the most honoured member. Gibbon's great book, whatever its faults, remains as the first great triumph of a genuine historical method.

82. It is indeed true that the defects are as conspicuous as the merits. Gibbon has left us in his admirable Autobiography one of the most characteristic portraits ever painted by man of himself. The critical passage in his life was his temporary lapse into Catholicism. Middleton and Bossuet are credited with his conversion in the Autobiography. The study of Middleton forced upon him the dilemma that either miraculous powers must have continued in the Church for the first four or five centuries, during which the leading doctrines of Popery had clearly been introduced, or that they had never existed. That, in fact, was a legitimate inference from

[1] Gibbon, Misc. Works, i. 224.

the historical point of view. Granting what Gibbon assumed, that miraculous powers are the test of orthodoxy, the arbitrary attempts to circumscribe the sphere of manifestation necessarily became unsatisfactory to a youth whose reading already extended beyond the charmed circle of the evidence-writers. Gibbon was, at present, averse to scepticism, and accepted the other branch of the dilemma. Bossuet finished what Middleton had begun. A conviction, however, of this kind was eminently precarious. A faith which rested solely upon the historical evidence of miracles was not likely to strike deep roots in so cool an intellect and in such a century. Gibbon's Catholicism, in fact, was nothing more than a temporary misapprehension of certain historical arguments; it was a conviction of the head, not of the heart; and, as his knowledge widened and deepened it spontaneously disappeared. He believed in Catholicism as he might have believed in the authenticity of a disputed document, and nothing but wider enquiry was needed to dissipate the superficial impression.

83. A conversion of this kind is significant of the weak side of Gibbon's intellect and character. He has given an admirable summary of the bare facts of history, but he is everywhere conspicuously deficient in that sympathetic power which enables an imaginative writer to breathe life into the dead bones of the past. He regards all creeds, political and religious, from the outside. He examines the evidence for facts with judicial severity, but is quite incapable of sharing or appreciating the passions of which the facts are the outward symbols. A skilful anatomical demonstrator of the dead framework of society, he is an utterly incompetent observer of its living development. A long series of historical figures passes before us in his stately pages, but they resemble the masks in a funeral procession. They are grouped with exquisite literary skill; but we catch no glimpse of the profounder springs of action which must be appreciated before we can understand the underlying order, or guess at the dominant laws of evolution. In perfect harmony with this view, his ideal state of society is the deathlike trance of an enlightened despotism. 'If a man were called,' as he says in an often-quoted passage, 'to fix the period in the history of the world

during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous, he would, without hesitation, name that which elapsed from the death of Domitian to the accession of Commodus. The vast extent of the Roman empire was governed by absolute power, under the direction of virtue and wisdom.'[1] He does not sympathise with the periods marked by vehement ebullitions of human passion breaking down the frozen crust of society, evolving new forms of religion, art, and philosophy, and, in the process, producing struggles, excitement, and disorder, but with the periods of calm stagnation, when nobody believes strongly, feels warmly, or acts energetically. A peaceful acquiescence in the established order, not a heroic struggle towards a fuller satisfaction of all human instincts, is his ideal. Equilibrium, at whatever sacrifice obtained, is the one political good; and his millennium can be reached rather by men ceasing to labour than by their obtaining a full fruition. In all which, of course, Gibbon is the representative man of his time and class. He expresses the sentiments common in one form or other to Hume, to Walpole, to the great Whig families, to the men of the world, to the rulers of the Church, to the sceptics, and to the Conservatives of the day. Walpole, for example, had anticipated Gibbon's sentiments about the Roman empire,[2] and warmly expressed his admiration of Gibbon's own exposition.[3] Indolent scepticism combines naturally with political indifferentism. A time was to come when Gibbon's horror of political convulsions was to lead him to sympathise with Burke's most fiery denunciations of the revolution of which he, with the other sceptics of the day, was preparing the advent.[4] Insects who are eating out the heart of an old tree are not generally gratified, it may be supposed, by the crash and thunder of the fall. Meanwhile the fat, phlegmatic little man polished his sarcasms, and sneered Christianity away with the most perfect unconsciousness that hot-blooded revolutionists were drawing strange lessons from his pages. He is the most perfect type of the conservative sceptic, unintentionally co-operating with the Paines, Priestleys and

[1] 'Decline and Fall,' p. 31.
[2] Walpole's Letters, v. 322.
[3] Ib. vi. 308.
[4] See Gibbon's Misc. Works, i. 269 and ii. 433.

Prices, whom he despised from his study, and to whom he offered a kind of dumb opposition in his brief parliamentary career.

84. How could such a man make an effective attack upon the greatest of all spiritual movements, of which the true causes lay in a region altogether inscrutable by his methods of enquiry? If to answer that question we take his own statement of his argument, we are surprised by the apparent weakness of the attack. The growth of the new sect was favoured, he tells us, by five secondary causes. (1) By the inflexible and intolerant zeal of the Christians, derived from the Jews, but purified from the narrow spirit which had confined Judaism to a single nation; (2) by the doctrine of a future life; (3) by the miraculous powers ascribed to the primitive Church; (4) by the purity and austerity of the Christian morals; and (5) by the organisation of the 'Christian republic.' Granting the efficacy of all these causes, what is there of which a Christian need complain? How, an apologist naturally enquires, did the Jews and Christians come to be zealous? Had not their zeal a supernatural source? Why did the Jewish religion throw off its narrowness? Why did the doctrine of a future life simultaneously reveal its power over the minds of so many races? What caused the miraculous stories, common enough in all rude ages, to become such effective engines for conversion? To what did Christianity owe its moral power, and whence came the cohesive power of the organisation? To these and similar questions Gibbon either gives no reply, or contents himself with hinting an indirect answer. Christianity, on his showing, sprang up like a mushroom. No particular reason can be given for it, any more than for any passing fashion of thought. Such a theory is at least reconcilable to a belief in its supernatural origin. Gibbon, indeed, is as incapable of understanding the spiritual significance of the phenomenon as of assigning a cause for it. From his pages little can be learnt as to the true significance of the greatest religious convulsion that has transformed the world's history.

85. And yet it is true, not merely that Gibbon struck a heavy blow at Christianity, but that he struck by far the heaviest blow which it had yet received from any single hand.

What he did was to bring the genuine spirit of historical enquiry for the first time face to face with the facts. Little as he may have appreciated the deeper significance of the process whose external symptoms he describes, his method must provide the primary data from which a reasonable judgment must be formed. He did not explain the phenomenon, but he reduced it within the sphere of the explicable. He dispersed that vague halo of assumption which gave a totally unreal character to all discussions about the origins of Christianity. To others it was left to put fresh life into the facts, but after Gibbon's lucid statement, any candid apologist was bound either to assail its accuracy more seriously than has ever been done, or to admit that, so far as the spread of Christianity outside Judea was concerned, there could be no need of resorting to supernatural explanations. Gibbon's argument is indeed trammelled by the necessity imposed upon him of substituting covert sneers for distinct assertion ; but its meaning may be fully brought out by comparing his remarks with the conventional line of argument familiar to all the apologists, and most lucidly set forth by Paley. When they emerged from narrow questions of Biblical criticism, their case might be very simply stated, and every part of it was met by Gibbon either denying the facts or denying the interpretation put upon them. The apologists sought to prove that certain miracles had happened at a given time. Their main, and indeed their sole, argument was that witnesses of unimpeachable character had died in attestation of the facts. Destroy this presumption, and the whole edifice must crumble. The early disciples, so the argument ran, had shown a zeal the intensity of which announced a heavenly origin. Direct inspiration, or the sight of miracles wrought before their eyes, could alone account for their faith and fervour. The leading doctrine which they announced—namely, the existence of a 'future state of rewards and punishments'—was worthy of a divine mission. The morality which they preached was pure and lofty, and opposed to all the prejudices of the nations converted. They must, therefore, have been able to appeal to supernatural evidences of a convincing character ; and their extraordinary success shows that the appeal was conclusive. They had nothing to gain by preaching a creed which led

neither to place nor power, and, on the other hand, they exposed themselves to the most cruel and unrelenting persecutions. How refuse to believe men, of zeal so fervent, of character so lofty, preaching so pure a doctrine, and successfully encountering such stringent tests? Are we not forced to admit that they must have been convinced by overpowering testimony? In answer to all this, the cool cynical historian scrutinises the facts, reduces them to their true proportions, points out the earthly ingredients in the heavenly zeal, and asks us calmly to consider whether the phenomenon, when seen in broad daylight, free from the distorting influences of ecclesiastical rhetoric, is really such as to imply the intervention of the Deity?

86. The Christians were zealous? True, but they had caught their zeal from the Jews, whose murderous fanaticism had justly entitled them to be called 'enemies of the human race.' They had, indeed, no right to affiliate their creed upon the Jews, for the Mosaic religion was obviously intended to be permanent. The Jewish Christians had maintained that the law was still binding; the Gnostics had reviled it as of human origin and degrading tendency; whilst the orthodox, acknowledging its divinity, had yet maintained it to be of temporary obligation. But Ebionites, Gnostics, and orthodox had alike caught its ferocious spirit, and denounced all other religions as the worship of devils. The Christians, you say, taught the doctrine of another life, which had been but dimly perceived by pagan philosophy. Certainly, replies Gibbon, philosophers laid but little stress upon it, and Moses omitted it altogether. It was really introduced by the later Jews from those Eastern nations amongst whom it had been a convenient instrument of priestly ambition. It did not serve that purpose less when applied by Christian teachers, and fitted with a convenient corollary. In fact, the doctrine of a future world was intimately connected with the belief in the millennium, once generally accepted, though now universally exploded, in the Church, which was an admirable device for working upon the popular imagination. The condemnation to eternal torture of all the best heathens, which accompanied the belief in the second coming of Christ, was a good method of stimulating Christian zeal. The early Church, it is said, claimed miracu-

lous powers. But does that prove that the powers existed, or that the early believers were grossly credulous? Middleton's argument is employed by his former convert to demonstrate that the same claim was made throughout many ages. The choice between accepting and rejecting all miracles will be easily made by anyone who reflects that the society amongst which Christianity first spread regarded supernatural intervention as the natural, instead of the exceptional, state of things. The early Christians, as their apologists proceed, were men of pure morals. Gibbon replies that many gross sinners found the doctrine of absolution highly convenient. He adds that the code of morality enforced was not calculated to make men either agreeable or useful in this world. Its asceticism compares unfavourably with the patriotic spirit of the pagans. The contempt, indeed, for art and pleasure was a convenient doctrine for the poor and ignorant, whilst the aversion to an active life contributed rather to excuse Christians 'from the service than to exclude them from the honours of the state and army.' The Christians, you say, had no worldly ambition. Gibbon replies by describing the great ecclesiastical hierarchy which was speedily developed, drew to itself vast revenues, and wielded a tremendous power by the threat of excommunication. Reflecting upon the zeal, the credulity, and the powerful organisation of the Christians, and upon the fluctuating mass of superstitions to which they were opposed, we shall be less surprised at the rapid progress of the faith than astonished 'that its success was not still more rapid and still more universal.' But, at any rate, the Christians converted the world, and converted it in the face of a terrible persecution. To the first statement Gibbon replies by a survey of the empire, noticing such facts as that the Christians, after sixty years of imperial favour, could reckon but a fifth part of the inhabitants of Antioch, and in the middle of the third century but a twentieth part of the inhabitants of Rome. His conclusion is that, at the time of Constantine's conversion, not one in twenty of his subjects were Christians. Philosophers regarded the sect with contempt, and strangely omitted to notice the miracles and the fulfilment of prophecy which were supposed to be shaking the world. Finally, the sixteenth chapter is devoted to an elaborate examination of the intensity and

duration of the persecutions, which played so great a part in apologetic writings. A really serious attack was not made upon Christianity till the reign of Diocletian, when, perhaps, 2000 victims perished in the whole empire. If Grotius is to be believed, the number of Protestants 'executed in a single province and a single reign far exceeded that of the primitive martyrs in the space of three centuries and of the Roman empire.' If Grotius be convicted of exaggeration, what confidence can be placed in 'the imperfect monuments of ancient credulity,' and in the testimony of a courtly bishop under Constantine?

87. Omitting, then, many indirect sneers, Gibbon's reply to the apologists is easily summed up. The zeal of the early Christians, he says, was earthly; their doctrine of a future life subordinated to worldly purposes; their legends of miracles, so many proofs of their credulity; their morality imperfect, and suited to popular prejudices; their disavowal of ambition, a mere covering to ambition of a different kind; their success was singularly slow and imperfect; and the sufferings which they endured not to be compared to those which have been voluntarily encountered by other men supported by no supernatural intervention. If these statements were well founded, and they came from no superficial caviller, but with all the authority of a vast erudition, the flourishes of the Christian apologists were simply flourishes. Not one of the statements upon which their case was rested could stand a serious examination. Of course, this fact did not prevent the old statements from being repeated, and repeated without the slightest reference to Gibbon's conclusions; apologists could still write as though every early Christian had professed to have been an eyewitness of stupendous miracles, had been converted in defiance of all his prejudices, and had died a martyr to the truth. Any serious answer, however, had henceforth to be placed on a different basis. The early deists might be met by ingenious explanations of isolated difficulties. To meet Gibbon plausibly nothing less was required than the formation of an intelligent and coherent theory of history.

88. Gibbon was astonished at the indignation excited by his assault. He had not believed that the majority of

English readers 'were so fondly attached even to the name and shadow of Christianity' [1]—a mistake characteristic enough of a writer so little in sympathy with the national passions. To us it appears more surprising that this assault upon the faith should have encouraged so few champions to take up the gauntlet. A certain number of replies were, indeed, published; but they excited and deserved little interest. Only for a moment was Gibbon tempted to abandon his attitude of calm contempt. Poor Mr. Davis, B.A., of Balliol College, was the chief victim of his wrath. This young gentleman pursued the simple plan of looking out Gibbon's references with little more knowledge of the context than could be scraped together at the moment, and endeavoured to impeach the use made of them. He succeeded in discovering some misprints, and in exhibiting his own ignorance. The book, says his biographer, 'shows more knowledge than is usually found at the age of twenty-one,' [2] but the stripling was no match for Goliah. He succeeded, however, in vexing his antagonist by imputations of bad faith; supposing that Gibbon had stolen the notes of Barbeyrac and Middleton without consulting the originals. 'Victory over such antagonists,' says Gibbon, 'was a sufficient humiliation.' [3] Davis, however, according to Gibbon, was rewarded by a pension for his services—a fact significant of a strange dearth of skilled apologists.

89. Gibbon, however, speaks of one antagonist with a respect due rather to his courtesy than to the force of his arguments. Richard Watson, Bishop of Llandaff, represents in its fullest development the contemporary type of orthodox divine. His anecdotes of his own life are, in their way, as curious as Gibbon's Autobiography. He lays bare the intrinsically selfish and worldly nature of his ambition with a distinctness unimpaired by the slightest consciousness of his defects. He regards himself as a pattern of true virtue, though lamentably unappreciated by his superiors. Nor, to say the truth, can we refuse to him that kind of respect which is due to any man who works out his own theory of life, even though it be a low one, vigorously, unflinchingly, and

[1] Misc. Works, i. 230. [2] See Chalmers.
[3] Gibbon, Misc. Works, i. 21. The 'Vindication' is in vol. iv.

without actual dishonesty. A sturdy North-country man, the son of a Westmoreland schoolmaster, he fought his way to success at Cambridge by the strenuous exertion of a shrewd practical understanding. At the age of twenty-seven he was made professor of chemistry, being then, as he tells us, in utter ignorance of the science. Fourteen months afterwards he had prepared himself sufficiently to begin a course of lectures, which, when subsequently published, received a high eulogium from Sir Humphry Davy. He could scarcely imagine, said that eminent authority, a time or condition of the science in which the bishop's lectures would be superannuated.[1] On the death of the Professor of Divinity some years later, Watson was elected to the vacancy, threw his science aside for ever, and proceeded to get up divinity as he had got up chemistry. He laid down, however, a singularly modest scheme for study, as he determined 'to study nothing but his Bible,' in order 'to reduce the study of divinity within as narrow a compass as he could.'[2] He answered all arguments in the schools by holding up the New Testament and exclaiming 'en sacrum codicem!'[3] Doubtless, a very compendious method, but of rather bad augury for an assailant of Gibbon. Politics, however, rather than divinity, were to help him towards his ultimate goal—a seat on the bench. He was a staunch Whig, after the school of Locke and Hoadly; and his services as a partisan were rewarded by Lord Shelburne in 1782 with the bishopric of Llandaff. And there, much to his annoyance, he remained to the end of his days. His position, indeed, might seem to be enviable. As there was no residence in his diocese, he settled in a comfortable country-house on the banks of Windermere. As the episcopal income was small, he felt it a matter of duty not to resign his professorship, inasmuch as without its emoluments (which he boasts of having raised to 1000*l.* a year) he would have been reduced to a paltry annual 1500*l.*[4] He seldom attended his duties in the House of Lords; but it is proved that he did not take to drinking or sporting. He employed himself 'not in field diversions, in idle visitings, in county bickerings, in idleness or intemperance,' but 'partly in supporting the re-

[1] De Quincey, 'Lake Poets,' Works, ii. 106, 109.
[2] Watson's 'Anecdotes,' i. 62.
[3] Ib. p. 63.
[4] Ib. ii. 280.

ligion and constitution of his country by seasonable publications, and principally' in agricultural operations and the education of his children.[1] Thus he boasts that he restored his health, preserved his independence, set an example of spirited husbandry to the country, and honourably provided for his children. In estimating this last claim to our respect, it must not be forgotten that he had acquired a large personal fortune from the bequest of a friend, and was married to a member of one of the chief county families. And yet this fortunate and exemplary prelate had a grievance which embittered his temper, and seems to have soured his view of politics. The Archbishop of York did not die at the moment when Watson's friends were in power. Had that event occurred, he would have reached the summit of his ambition. As it was, he sees the seamy side of things; states very forcibly, though without giving himself as an example, the evil results of the system of translation upon the independence of bishops; proposes an equalisation of their incomes to enable them to 'reside;' and laments over the ingratitude of Pitt, whose Cambridge election he had secured, though he opposed the ministry in Parliament.

90. Watson's theology was of the simplest kind. So far as it was anything more in his eyes than a qualification for a bishopric, it meant a belief that the resurrection of Christ could be proved.[2] If we may believe De Quincey, an extremely loose reporter of facts, he talked openly as a Socinian at his own table, and ridiculed the New Testament miracles as legerdemain.[3] However this may be, theological tenets hung as loosely upon his mind as was compatible with any assertion of Christianity. An attack upon an infidel, however, was more useful than a lecture upon chemistry to a candidate for ecclesiastical preferment, and in 1776 Watson spent a month of the long vacation in confuting Gibbon.[4] Remembering the nature of Watson's studies in theology, one cannot imagine that he was very deeply in earnest. The controversy, indeed, was so conducted as to bring about an exchange of personal courtesies. Gibbon requested the honour of the professor's acquaintance. Watson in reply hoped that no regard for him

[1] 'Anecdotes,' i. 389.
[2] Ib. i. 23.
[3] De Quincey, ii. 111.
[4] 'Anecdotes,' i. 98.

would induce Gibbon 'to conceal any explanations which might tend to exalt the beauties' of 'an offspring which has justly excited the admiration of all who have seen it.'[1] He afterwards thanked Gibbon for a courteous reference in the 'Vindication,' and half apologised for his attack, on the ground that he did not want to be deprived of the hope of a future existence which depended entirely on his belief in Christianity.[2] Had Gibbon's writings tended to deprive him of his hopes of a bishopric, Watson's blows would have been less carefully muffled.

91. That a month's labour in such a spirit should produce any worthy answer to Gibbon was, of course, out of the question. Watson does not venture to raise any serious dispute as to his opponent's facts, unless we except a cursory attempt to prove that the belief in the millennium was less widely spread than Gibbon had stated; and even here he has evidently not gone beyond Mosheim and Whitby for his materials. He argues, however, skilfully and fluently enough, like a lawyer who has to take a brief at a moment's notice and is not able to dispute the evidence alleged against him. He makes the obvious remarks that the zeal of the Christians could not be derived from their enemies, the Jews; that the Romans could not be moved by threats of a hell which they disbelieved; that false miracles would discredit instead of advancing a cause, and so on. He never descends to a childish argument, though we half fancy that he is smiling in his sleeve when he says that the Apostles could not have expected the end of the world, because they foresaw the corruptions of Rome;[3] or argues that the darkness at the Crucifixion was perhaps overlooked by pagan philosophers because it was not very dark.[4] Still, he writes a good style, and resembles Paley in logical vigour as well as in the general tone of his theology. Perhaps he is less successful in impressing us with the reality of his zeal. One passage in his defence announces the approach of new difficulties. A certain argument, he says, has 'become a common subject of philosophical conversation, especially amongst those who have visited the continent.'[5] It appeared, in fact, that Canon Recupero had proved from the

[1] De Quincey, i. 101. [2] 'Anecdotes,' i. 107. [3] 'Apology,' p. 37. [4] Ib. p. 97. [5] Ib. p. 151.

lavas of Mount Etna that the world must be at least 14,000 years old. Geology, which had been so comforting to the Hutchinsonians, was beginning to desert to the enemy. Watson suggests a possible extension of time in the beginning of Genesis; but is still inclined to dispute the facts, and confronts Etna with Vesuvius. The weary series of accommodations of Genesis to geology was beginning.

92. The scene suddenly changes. A new controversialist comes upon the stage by no means inclined to cultivate the acquaintance of bishops, and caring for no disguise to his sharp, savage earnestness. Paine's 'Age of Reason' bears visible traces of the time of its composition. The manuscript of the first part was entrusted to a friend, when the Convention imprisoned the author at the end of 1793. The second was published in 1795, when he had just cheated the guillotine. The third appeared at New York in 1807, shortly before his death. The first two parts therefore shocked all respectable England as it shuddered from the other side of the Channel at the wild outburst of revolutionary horrors in France. Good Englishmen expressed their disgust for the irreverent infidel by calling him Tom, and the name still warns all men that its proprietor does not deserve even posthumous civility. Paine indeed is, in a sense, but the echo of Collins and Woolston; but the tone of the speaker is altered. Democracy and infidelity have embraced, and scepticism has flashed out into sudden explosion. The early deists wrote for educated men. Paine is appealing to the mob. His readers could see in the background a church in ruins, and a guillotine waiting for priests. That spectacle had frightened the calm historian, who could not fail to reflect that, as throne and altar went down, even libraries might be in danger of conflagration. But the 'rebellious needleman' was an incendiary, and one not to be rashly despised. His ignorance was vast, and his language brutal; but he had the gift of a true demagogue, the power of wielding a fine vigorous English, a fit vehicle for fanatical passion. His tracts may be set without too much disadvantage beside the attack upon Wood's halfpence, or the best pieces of Cobbett.

93. The 'Age of Reason,' indeed, sometimes amuses by the author's impudent avowals of ignorance. In the last part, he

mentions a few authorities, and appears to have been dabbling in some enquiries as to the origin of the Jewish and Christian faiths. This, however, was an afterthought. In the first part he avows, with some ostentation, that he has not even a copy of the Bible. Quoting Addison's paraphrase of the nineteenth psalm, he adds, 'I recollect not the prose, and when I write this, I have not the opportunity of seeing it.'[1] Before the publication of the second part, he had 'furnished himself with a Bible and Testament,' and found them to be 'much worse books than he had conceived.'[2] Regarding the 'knowledge of languages' as very inferior to the 'knowledge of things,'[3] and, indeed, considering philological studies as a device by which priests distract their slaves from attention to science, he is of course not acquainted with the languages of the Bible. Wishing to prove that much of it is so poetical that even the translation retains 'the air and style of poetry,' and remembering that some of his readers may consider that poetry means rhyming, he adds to a verse from Isaiah a line of his own composition:

> Hear, O ye heavens, and give ear, O earth,
> 'Tis God himself that calls attention forth.[4]

He explains, with equal simplicity, that his chronology is taken from the dates printed on the margins of the 'larger Bibles,' which he apparently supposes to be part of the original documents.[5] Paine, therefore, reproduces the objections to the Bible which occurred to him on a hasty reading, or which had reached him through the diffused scepticism of the time. It must be added, however, that such arguments might be effective enough with popular readers who regarded every letter of the English version as directly dictated by the Holy Ghost; and moreover keen mother-wit supplies many deficiencies, and Paine's reasoning often hits real blots, whilst it loses little by not being smothered in masses of erudition.

94. His reasoning, indeed, though defaced by much ribaldry, is simply the translation into popular language of a theory expounded by more accomplished critics. Can this record be really the word of the most high God of heaven and

[1] 'Age of Reason,' part i. 24.
[2] Ib. preface to part ii.
[3] Ib. part i. 30.
[4] Ib. p. 14.
[5] Ib. ii. 14.

earth? Paine, it is to be observed, was a believer in the *Être Suprème*, and addressed the society of Theophilanthropists in an argument deducing the existence of God from the motion impressed upon the solar system. 'What!' he exclaims in his letter to Erskine, after noticing the inconsistencies between the different accounts of the Creation, 'does not the Creator of the universe, the fountain of all wisdom, the origin of all science, the author of all knowledge, the God of order and of harmony, know how to write? Thomas Paine can write a book without forgetting in one page what he has written in another; cannot God Almighty?'[1] Paine, of course, knows nothing of, or cares nothing for, the refinements of philosophers and critics. He confronts the theories that God dictated the Bible; that all the human race has been damned to everlasting fire because Eve ate the apple; and that God's wrath against guilty man was satiated by punishing his innocent Son; whilst on some dogmas he puts a still grosser interpretation. His infant faith received the first shock, as he tells us, from a sermon on the redemption to which he listened at the age of seven or eight. 'As I was going down the garden steps (for I perfectly recollect the spot), I revolted at the recollection of what I had heard, and thought myself it was making God Almighty act like a passionate man that killed his son when he could not avenge himself any other way; and as I was sure that a man would be hanged that did such a thing, I could not see for what purpose they preached such sermons.'[2] His faith was finally upset by astronomical revelations of the extent of the universe. Whence, he asked, could arise the solitary and strange conceit that the Almighty, who had millions of worlds equally dependent on his perfections, should quit the universe and come to die in our world because they say one man and one woman had eaten an apple.'[3] The history of Paine's mind is the history of thousands. It expresses the revolt of rough common sense against the brutal theology by which coarse preachers appeal to dull imaginations. He is apparently ignorant that anything of the kind had been said before; and makes no reference to the deists, such as Tindal or Morgan, who had put his arguments into

[1] Letter to Erskine, p. 13.
[2] 'Age of Reason,' part i. 37.
[3] Ib. p. 44.

more decent language. He is delighted when he discovers that Conyers Middleton—librarian to the University of Cambridge, and therefore 'acquainted with the dead as well as the living languages'[1]—had anticipated his declaration that God is revealed in the Creation. 'The Creation we behold,' says Paine, 'is the real and everlasting word of God; it proclaims his power; it demonstrates his wisdom; it manifests his goodness and beneficence,' and the moral duty of man consists in the imitation of the divine goodness.[2] That, together with the profession of a rather hesitating belief in another life, is the summary of Paine's creed; and it is simply the creed of all the deists of the eighteenth century.

95. Paine's peculiarity consists in the freshness with which he comes upon very old discoveries, and the vehemence with which he announces them. In the first part of the 'Age of Reason' he treats the Bible in a very summary fashion, arguing that we have no sufficient guarantee for its authenticity, and winding up with the round assertion that, 'when we read the obscene stories, the cruel and barbarous executions, the unrelenting vindictiveness with which more than half the Bible is filled, it would be more consistent that we called it the work of a demon than the word of God. It is a history of wickedness,' he adds, 'that has served to corrupt and brutalise mankind; and, for my own part, I sincerely detest it, as I detest everything that is cruel.'[3] The most remarkable argument in the second part is a collection of the various passages which, if occurring in the original, show that the so-called books of Moses cannot have been composed by Moses or his contemporaries. Such, for example, is the reference to kings reigning in Israel (Genesis xxxvi. 31) and the mention in the story of Lot (Genesis xiv. 14) of Dan, a place which is elsewhere said to have been called Laish till a date much later than that assigned to the Pentateuch. The remarks are creditable to Paine's shrewdness. The same difficulties had been suggested long before by Spinoza and by Newton; but those writers were apparently beyond the range of his reading. Dealing with the other books of the Old Testa-

[1] 'Age of Reason,' iii. 49. The passage quoted from Middleton is in the 'Vindication of a Free Enquiry' (Misc. Works, ii. 135).

[2] Ib. i. 32. [3] Ib. i. 13.

ment, Paine discovers Isaiah to be 'one continued incoherent rant' of 'prose run mad;'[1] Jeremiah is full of 'duplicity and false predictions,'[2] and so incoherent that he might be taken for a madman; the books of Ezekiel and Daniel are probably genuine, but must either consist of a cipher to which we have lost the key, or be considered as mere 'reveries and nonsense.'[3] The New Testament fares no better; and, after pointing out some of the inconsistencies of the genealogies, of the Resurrection stories, and so on, he holds it to be impossible to find in any story on record 'so many and such glaring absurdities, contradictions, and falsehoods as are in these books. They are more numerous and striking than I had any expectation of finding, and far more so than I had any idea of when I wrote the former part of the "Age of Reason."'[4] As, however, men of greater qualifications have gone over the ground before and since, it would be superfluous to follow Paine; it is enough to mention that the third part is a reproduction of Collins's old argument against the applicability of the prophecies quoted in the New Testament.

96. 'Who born within the last forty years,' asks Burke in 1790, 'has read one word of Collins, and Toland, and Tindal, and Chubb, and Morgan, and that whole race who called themselves freethinkers? Who now reads Bolingbroke? Who ever read him through?'[5] Deep oblivion had, indeed, settled upon the deists; but the publication of the 'Age of Reason' suggested an unpleasant explanation of the phenomenon. Deism was not dead, but sleeping; and the sleep was ominous of little good. The strange lethargy which had crept over the rival forces was disappearing, and Deism appeared again ferocious and menacing. Here was the end of a century of apologetic literature! More and more, as I have attempted to show, the disposition to justify Christianity by exhibiting its spiritual excellence had declined; and divines had contented themselves with summing up in slightly varied forms the old series of evidences. Christian theology, limited to the bare statement that certain facts had happened a long time ago, was struck with sterility; it might suit

[1] 'Age of Reason,' ii. 42.
[2] Ib. p. 50.
[3] Ib. p. 56.
[4] Ib. p. 74.
[5] Burke's 'Reflections,' Works, v. 172.

absentee bishops and professors of divinity, perfunctorily treading their mill-wheel round of duty. Respectability found in it a congenial creed, and even sceptics might regard it as a highly convenient varnish. But Paine's book announced a startling fact, against which all the flimsy collection of conclusive proofs were powerless. It amounted to a proclamation that the creed no longer satisfied the instincts of rough common sense any more than the intellects of cultivated scholars. When the defenders of the old order tried to conjure with the old charms, the magic had gone out of them. In Paine's brutal tones they recognised not the mere echo of coffee-house gossip, but the voice of deep popular passion. Once and for ever, it was announced that, for the average mass of mankind, the old creed was dead. A different war-cry from that of Crusaders or of Puritans was henceforth to stir men's souls.

97. No wonder that the upper world shrieked blasphemy! obscenity! Atheism! Nor is it strange that the luckless publisher was sentenced to a year's imprisonment, amidst general applause, and that Erskine for once appeared on the side of authority. Paine, indeed, deserved moral reprobation for his brutality; and his book has in it an unpleasant flavour. Yet there was a fact which the respectable public tried hard to ignore. Paine's appeal was not simply to licentious hatred of religion, but to genuine moral instincts. His 'blasphemy' was not against the Supreme God, but against Jehovah. He was vindicating the ruler of the universe from the imputations which believers in literal inspiration and in dogmatic theology had heaped upon him under the disguise of homage. He was denying that the God before whom reasonable creatures should bow in awful reverence could be the supernatural tyrant of priestly imagination, who was responsible for Jewish massacres, who favoured a petty clan at the expense of his other creatures, who punished the innocent for the guilty, who lighted the fires of everlasting torment for the mass of mankind, and who gave a monopoly of his favours to priests, or a few favoured enthusiasts. Paine, in short, with all his brutalities, had the conscience of his hearers on his side; and we must prefer his rough exposure of popular errors to the unconscious blasphemy of his supporters.

98. How was he answered? Partly by inarticulate shrieking, and partly, too, by such serious replies as occurred to the dignified and decorous Bishop of Llandaff. Watson once more went through the regular parade of defence; he compares the massacre of the Canaanites to an earthquake; says that the Jewish tradition for the authenticity of the Scriptures is as strong evidence as he could desire; accounts for the anachronisms in the Pentateuch by later interpolations; and thinks that the young women reserved from the slaughter of the Midianites were not intended for debauchery, but for slavery, a custom everywhere prevalent in early times.[1] He intersperses becoming bursts of indignation, with edifying passages of Christian unction, and prays for the soul of his opponent. Nothing could be more becoming from a non-resident bishop and professor of divinity. At present the interest of the 'Apology,' which, as the reviewers of the time declared, 'answered every argument or cavil in the plainest and clearest manner,' has become rather clouded.

99. But here, on the verge of a new epoch, I close my survey of the century of controversy. Infidelity is again rampant, and old orthodoxy looking on with perplexity and affected contempt at the reviving monster. Watson was seen in the flesh by De Quincey, who survived till our own day. He talked with Coleridge, the parent of that metaphysical theology which attempted to revive the ancient religion by spiritualising it after a new fashion; before he died the leaders of new spiritual movements had already made their appearance in the world. Popular religion had revived under the influence of Wesley and his followers; science was beginning to affect a new authority within the sphere of religious thought; and the strange revivalism of our days was faintly beginning to shadow itself forth. New issues were being raised, and new vistas were opening in every direction. How English thought was to shape itself in future, and how many old arguments were to be fought over once more under new influences, is a topic full of interest, but which falls outside my present purpose.

[1] See Watson's 'Apologies,' pp. 187, 190, 212, &c.

## NOTE TO CHAPTER VIII.

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